# The Quiet Touch of the Flame

the subtle woodfire aesthetics of the ceramics of
Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie (1895–1985), Jacqueline Lerat (1920–2009),
and Gwyn Hanssen Pigott (1935–2013)

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
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**Summary:**

Woodfire methodologies with the aim of achieving a wide range of aesthetic outcomes continue to be prevalent within contemporary international ceramics practice. Individual woodfire practices have developed based on choices of materials and processes, and many practitioners are finding in woodfiring a challenging, satisfying, and inspiring endeavour, providing on-going potential for personal expression.

This thesis is concerned with aesthetic outcomes resulting from specific approaches to the process of woodfiring, which combined I am terming 'The Quiet Touch of the Flame', a description that I have been using in my published writings for some twenty years. The aesthetic aims and work of three potters and artists that are expressive of this descriptive term, and to which it can appropriately be applied are its central focus. They are Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, Britain (1895–1985), Jacqueline Lerat, France (1920–2009), and Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, Australia (1935–2013).

In the context of this thesis the use of the term 'quiet' extends beyond surface qualities achieved through woodfiring, and also relates to the mood evoked by individual pieces. It is argued that employing original creative approaches to produce innovative ranges of work incorporating woodfire methodologies that resulted in quiet surface effects, the three makers created work that evokes an overall sense of quietness.

It is also argued that their influence extended beyond the specialist areas of woodfiring and wood-fired ceramics, into the broader field of contemporary ceramics.

The practices of these makers are of significance from other perspectives, including the periods when they began woodfiring and exploring the potential it offered for the development of their work, the kilns that they used, and the research they carried out. There was a pioneering aspect to their involvement, not only in woodfiring, but pottery in general.

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Helen and John Minogue.

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## Abstract

Woodfire methodologies with the aim of achieving a wide range of aesthetic outcomes continue to be prevalent within contemporary international ceramics practice. Individual woodfire practices have developed based on choices of materials and processes, and many practitioners are finding in woodfiring a challenging, satisfying, and inspiring endeavour, providing on-going potential for personal expression.

This thesis is concerned with aesthetic outcomes resulting from specific approaches to the process of woodfiring, which I am terming 'The Quiet Touch of the Flame', a description that I have been using in my published writings for some twenty years.[1] Woodfire effects encompassed by the term The Quiet Touch of the Flame include, but are not limited to, the imparting of subtle natural ash effects on unglazed surfaces or the accentuation of previously glazed surfaces.

Examining work exemplifying a subtle woodfire aesthetic that is expressive of quietness leads to consideration of the overall mood evoked in such work and a questioning of how woodfire effects contribute to this mood. In the context of this study therefore, the use of the term 'quiet' extends beyond a reference to woodfire characteristics and has relevance with regard to the mood evoked by individual pieces.

The aesthetic aims and work of three potters and artists that are expressive of The Quiet Touch of the Flame, and to which this descriptive term can appropriately be applied are the central focus of the study. They are Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, Britain (1895–1985), Jacqueline Lerat, France (1920–2009), and Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, Australia (1935–2013). Both Pleydell-Bouverie and Hanssen Pigott glazed their work, while Jacqueline Lerat's abstract sculptural forms were unglazed.

This thesis argues that in employing original creative approaches to produce innovative ranges of work incorporating woodfire methodologies that resulted in quiet surface effects, the three makers produced work that evokes an overall sense of quietness. The quiet

1. Coll Minogue, 'Woodfiring – An Introduction', essay published in *Different Stokes International Woodfire Exhibition* catalogue, The University of Iowa School of Art and Art History Ceramic Area, 1999, page 9. Coll Minogue, 'The Quiet Touch of the Flame' a synopsis of my contribution as moderator of a panel with the same title, published in *Different Stokes International Woodfire Conference Proceedings*, The University of Iowa School of Art and Art History Ceramic Area, 1999, unpaginated.

characteristics that woodfiring contributed to their work, which were completely appropriate to it, could not have been achieved by any other means. The influence of the three extended beyond the specialist areas of woodfiring and wood-fired ceramics into the broader field of contemporary ceramics. There was a pioneering aspect to their involvement not only in woodfiring, but pottery in general, making their practices significant from other perspectives, including: the periods when they began woodfiring and exploring the potential it offered for the development of their work; the designs of kilns that they used, and the research they carried out.

It is an aim of this thesis to contribute to research on the methodologies and associated aesthetic outcomes of high-temperature wood-fired ceramics produced in the West in the twentieth/twenty first centuries.

The particular aesthetics associated with woodfiring and wood-fired ceramics with which this thesis is concerned have not hitherto been the subject of sustained academic research. That woodfiring contributed to the overall effects, evoking a sense of quietness in the work of the three individual potters and artists has likewise not been addressed. Nor have their pioneering woodfire practices – spanning the period from 1924 to 2013, been considered in a single study.

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## Notes on Conventions

### Clarification regarding the surnames of the three figures on whom this study is based

An issue that arose during my research was the names by which each of the subjects was known. For the avoidance of confusion I have chosen to refer to each figure by the name by which they were most widely known professionally, even when referring to periods before they assumed these names on marriage.

Jacqueline Lerat's birth surname was Bouvet. She took her husband Jean Lerat's surname on their marriage in 1944. As Jean was also an artist, in instances where confusion could arise Jacqueline is referred to by her first name.

Gwyn Hanssen Pigott's birth surname was John. Hanssen came from her first husband Louis Hanssen, whom she married in 1960, and Pigott from her second husband John Pigott, whom she married in 1976. She used the name Gwyn Hanssen whilst married to Louis Hanssen (1960–63), and up to the time of her second marriage. She was known as Gwyn Pigott for the duration of her second marriage (1976–80) and for some time thereafter. The name Gwyn Pigott was still being used in some references up to 1986 (although Gwyn Hanssen Pigott was also used as early as 1983). As far as I have succeeded in establishing, the name Gwyn Hanssen Pigott began to be more widely used sometime after 1986, and was certainly in general use by the early 1990s, when her new body of work based on still life assemblages was becoming widely known.

Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie did not marry and used her birth surname throughout her life.

### Japanese Names

Japanese names are given in traditional order, with family name first.

# Literature Review

## Introduction

This Literature Review considers high temperature wood-fired ceramics as developed and practiced in the West in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Due to the broad scope of the subject matter the literature discussed is of necessity limited to the main specialist texts that are relevant to the subject of this thesis. Most of these are in English. Those relating to Jacqueline Lerat are in French.

The first section reviews literature on the woodfire methodologies and associated aesthetics that developed in the West in the twentieth century, including the subtle woodfire aesthetics that are the subject of the thesis. Specialist international woodfire conferences and symposia proceedings will be discussed, as well as *The Log Book* – international wood-fired ceramics publication.

A second section considers the literature on, and by, three potters / artists whose work exemplifies a subtle woodfire aesthetic – Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, Britain (1895–1985), Jacqueline Lerat, France (1920–2009), and Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, Australia (1935–2013).

When Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, the earliest of the makers whose work is discussed began her pottery practice in 1925, incorporating a woodfire kiln, whilst the fact that her work was wood-fired (generally in saggars) undoubtedly contributed to its aesthetic appeal – this was not referred to specifically either by herself or in any contemporary commentary. It was however referenced retrospectively (her woodfire practice came to an end in 1939).

Practitioners themselves, rather than critics, art historians, or other academics, have written the vast majority of the literature that has been published about wood-fired ceramics. Woodfiring or wood-fired ceramics have not yet emerged as areas of particular academic study to any great extent. Given the current academic interest in and attention to all aspects of the crafts – historical, traditional and contemporary, it is surprising that woodfiring, wood-fired ceramics, and their associated aesthetics have not up to this time attracted higher levels of interest.

The woodfire aesthetics with which this thesis is concerned have not been specifically identified for discussion in the literature. They are however sometimes referenced by individual potters in written profiles, either autobiographical or by other authors. Consequently, to amass any quantity of written texts on the subject necessitates an extensive search through more general ceramics literature, as well as the more specialist sources that are considered here.

## Part 1 – A review of literature on the woodfire methodologies and associated aesthetics that developed in the West in the twentieth century, including the subtle woodfire aesthetics that are the subject of the thesis

### *A Potter's Book*

This review begins with what many consider the single most important and influential text on pottery in the English language published in the twentieth century. I am referring to *A Potter's Book* by Bernard Leach, which was first published in 1940. In outlining the advantages of firing with wood, Leach states that it was the fuel used 'from the very beginning in all the old potteries of the world, including those which produced the most beautiful quality of glaze'.[1] This is of direct relevance to the current study, as two of the potters whose work is being considered glazed their work, utilised the effects achievable by woodfiring to enhance the qualities of their glazes, and spent some time training at the Leach pottery. Pleydell-Bouverie fired her work in saggars, as did Leach, and Hanssen Pigott's work was fired open to flame and flyash effects.

Leach's endorsement of woodfiring was further supported in his statement that: 'Quite a large proportion of the most pleasing kiln effects were, in the days of manual labour, due to accidental happenings only partly under the control of the potters. The use of wood in firing has always contributed largely to such effects.'[2]

### *Pioneer Pottery*

Leach's first apprentice, Michael Cardew, wrote the second key text for English speaking potters to emerge from the founders of the studio pottery movement. This was *Pioneer Pottery*, which was first published in 1969. Cardew clearly endorsed woodfiring as the preferred method of firing, a process that he used throughout his own practice over six

1. Bernard Leach, *A Potters Book*, Faber & Faber (1973 edition), p.179.
2. Ibid., p.179.

decades, writing that: 'There are certain subtleties of colour, texture and depth which wood-firing, properly managed, will give you as it were as a free gift.'[3] As he does not specifically address the subject of natural ash-glazed work from long-duration or extended firing elsewhere in this book, it is probably safe to assume that Cardew's views expressed here relate to work from shorter firing cycles. Cardew's chapter on kilns referred almost exclusively to the design, building, and firing of woodfire kilns.

**Specialist books on woodfiring**

It is perhaps surprising given the popularity of woodfiring from the 1960s onwards that a specialist book on the subject was not published until 1995. This was Jack Troy's *Wood-Fired Stoneware and Porcelain,* in which the author discusses the historical, technical, and aesthetic aspects of woodfiring.[4] While much of the discussion and images of kilns and work reference anagama and long duration firing, a wide variety of other kiln types and woodfire effects are also included. References to aesthetics associated with woodfiring are to be found throughout, in relation to specific technical information on materials and the processes of firing, rather than in a separate chapter or chapter section. The effects of woodfiring on glazes are discussed and there was is analysis of the flashing that occurs on unglazed surfaces.

The second specialist book to be published was *Wood-fired Ceramics Contemporary Practices* by Coll Minogue and Robert Sanderson, in 2000.[5] Information of relevance to a study of woodfire aesthetics is to be found within the twenty-two chapters devoted to detailed biographical profiles of international ceramists, primarily in the form of quotes by the individuals. Some dwell more on the aesthetic aspect of their work, while others focus on more technical issues. Slightly over half of the potters who were profiled practiced long-duration firing.

A comprehensive range of the different types of wood-fired work and the kilns in which it was produced were represented in both Troy's book and the Minogue and Sanderson book. One of the main differences between the two is that *Wood-fired Ceramics* was more of a

3. Michael Cardew, *Pioneer Pottery* (first published 1969), Longman, 1977 p.171.
4. Jack Troy, *Wood-fired Stoneware and Porcelain*, Chilton, 1995.
5. Coll Minogue and Robert Sanderson, *Wood-fired Ceramics Contemporary Practices*, A & C Black, 2000.

survey of contemporary work, with less emphasis on the historical, and a broader range of international work was included.

*Japanese Wood-fired Ceramics* by Kusakabe Masakazu and Marc Lancet was published in 2005.[6] Despite the title, which could lead one to assume that this book was a survey of Japanese wood-fired ceramics, it was instead an analysis of Japanese descriptive terms used for the range of woodfire effects that can be achieved, and was illustrated with examples of work by the two authors.

*The Art of Woodfire A Contemporary Ceramics Practice*, by Owen Rye, which despite its title pertained only to woodfiring in an Australian context, was published in 2011.[7] It covered aesthetic considerations, woodfire practice, and technical discussion. Statements by twenty-three contemporary Australian woodfire artists were included. By the second page of the section on aesthetics Rye had stated that 'Woodfire now usually means ceramics fired in an anagama-style kiln'. As in the first two books discussed above, it is in the individual statements and quotes by the featured potters that much of the information pertaining to woodfire aesthetics is to be found. The majority, but not all, practiced long duration firing.

Rye argued that although the kilns and firing techniques employed by potters practicing long-duration firing in Australia were influenced by Japanese models, stating that 'Gradually, awareness of Japanese aesthetics faded as the self-taught origins led Australian woodfirers to individual approaches in technique, resulting in a distinctive aesthetic'. He continued 'We embrace a personal evolution rather than looking somewhere else for inspiration'.

In 2013 another book on wood-fired ceramics was published – *Wood-fired Ceramics – 100 Contemporary Artists*, by Amedeo Salamoni.[8] As the title suggests this was a survey-type book, but was not, as one might have expected, a survey of contemporary international wood-fired ceramics. Of the featured artists only thirteen were from outside the USA, including five from Canada. Some of the statements by the artists included were entirely focussed on materials and processes; others provide more insight to their work and reasons for woodfiring.

6. Kusakabe, Masakazu, and Marc Lancet, *Japanese Wood-fired Ceramics*, Kodansha, 2005.
7. Owen Rye, *The Art of Woodfire A Contemporary Ceramics Practice*, Mansfield Press, 2011.
8. Amedeo Salamoni, *Wood-fired Ceramics – 100 Contemporary Artists*, Schiffer Publishing, 2013.

**Specialist international woodfire conferences and symposia proceedings**

Far more of the literature on woodfiring has emerged in the form of conference proceedings than in specialist books or more general ceramics magazines.[9] The subject of the aesthetics of wood-fired ceramics has been the focus of debate at most of the specialist woodfire conferences that have taken place.

The first woodfire conference to take place in the West was at the Japan Society in New York in April 1983. The purpose of the conference was to address issues of concern that emerged as a result of the findings of the American Woodfire Survey that had been conducted the previous year. While no proceedings were published for this conference written or transcribed remarks of the panel members were included in the *Studio Potter* magazine in an article with the title 'A Symposium on Woodfiring Aesthetics'.[10] While one of subjects for discussion was 'aesthetic considerations dealing with glazed or unglazed pots and with long or short firings', which may have addressed subtle woodfire aesthetics, it would appear that most of the discussion centred on long duration firing and Japanese woodfire aesthetics.

The New York symposium was followed a few weeks later in May 1983, by the two-day 'Peters Valley Woodfire Conference' held at Peters Valley Craft Center in New Jersey. The main theme of this conference was 'the significance of woodfired kilns in America'. Transcripts of some of the panel discussions were published in a subsequent issue of *Studio Potter* magazine. Again, judging from these it would appear that the focus was on both American and Japanese anagama-fired work, with a few brief mentions of glazed wood-fired work. There was no analysis of the aesthetics of the glazed work, in the same way, or to the same extent, as the anagama-fired work. Art historian Andrew Pekarik discussing the surface qualities of wood-fired work stated:

> In the period in Japan when ash-encrusted ceramics were most interesting to tea people, they were restricted for the most part to certain types of objects that were not meant to be handled – flower vases, big tea jars, water jars. Anything you had to pick up and handle and drink tea out of […] was rarely made in this kind of rough

9. Proceedings have been published for the following woodfire conferences – Australia 1986; 1989; 1992; 1993; USA 1999; 2004. In addition selected lectures from both the USA 2006 and Australian 2008 conferences were published online.
10. 'A Symposium on Woodfiring Aesthetics' (New York, NY, April 16, 1983), *Studio Potter*, Vol. 12, No. 1, December 1983, pp.70–81.

> clay. They were glazed wares. I have a special love of good glazed wares. Woodfiring adds special qualities to glazed ware.[11]

The largest woodfire conference to have taken place up to that time was held over three days at the University of Iowa in 1991, organised by Chuck Hindes, at which there were over 200 attendees. The conference had an aesthetics panel (six members), a potter's panel, and a technical panel (each with three members). Proceedings were not published for the conference. However, I was present and recall that again the emphasis was heavily weighed in favour of discussion of anagama/long-duration woodfire aesthetics.

Eight years later Chuck Hindes organised another conference in Iowa, which this time was international in scope and had an attendance of over 450. The focus was much broader at this event, with speakers from fifteen countries addressing a wide range of woodfire approaches and aesthetics, including my own panel on 'The Quiet Touch of the Flame'. Comprehensive proceedings of the conference were published, including papers on glazed wood-fired work, firing in Bourry-box kilns, and shorter firing cycles.

Iowa was again the location for the next international woodfire conference to take place in the USA, in Cedar Rapids, in 2004. The conference resulted in more publications than any of the previous events, with four separate volumes: proceedings, catalogues of the International Invitational Exhibition and the International Juried Exhibition, and a network book including contact details of all 170 attendees. A broad approach to the subject of woodfiring was represented in the published papers.

The first comprehensive proceedings of a specialist woodfire conference to be published were those of the 1986 event organised by Owen Rye at Gippsland Institute of Advanced Education in Victoria, Australia (a 172 page book). The lead paper contained the results of the first woodfire survey to be carried out in Australia. Further papers addressed a wide range of topics, from 'Reduced Lustre Technique', to 'Bizen Pottery: Ash Deposit Firing and Aesthetics'. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott's paper was a summary of her experience of, and attitude towards the process of woodfiring, with brief references to the aesthetic aspects of her practice and those of her early mentors.

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11. 'The Peters Valley Woodfire Conference', *Studio Potter*, Vol. 12, No. 2, June 1984, pp.85–86.

Further woodfire conferences followed in Australia on a fairly regular basis (and continue today). Proceedings were published for two subsequent conferences, and one woodfire event. The 1989 conference took place at Gulgong in New South Wales, organised by Janet Mansfield. While there was not a paper specifically on the subject of woodfire aesthetics, it was referenced in several, particularly combined with process. Concerns were raised regarding the consequences of woodfiring on ecological grounds in a few papers. Of most relevance to the current study was Ivan McMeekin's comprehensive paper on the Bourry-box type kiln and reference to the method employed by Hanssen Pigott to reduce the quantity of ash, and the quality of ash deposits in keeping with her aesthetic aims.

In 1992 a conference was held at Southern Cross University in Lismore (NSW, Australia). Again a wide range of woodfire related topics were discussed in the published papers. Woodfire aesthetics as they pertain to individual practices involving both long and short firings, and glazed as well as unglazed work were addressed in some of these.

Proceedings were published for the 1993 woodfire event 'Fire-up Gulgong', which was not primarily a conference, but a kiln building and firing event. The papers were reports on the firings of the range of kilns at Janet Mansfield's property, where the event took place (as had 'Woodfire '89'). The event provided attendees with an opportunity to experience a variety of different firing processes in kilns with both long and short firing cycles, and their attendant aesthetics possibilities. The resulting papers reflected these concerns.

In instances where entire proceedings have not been published (and in some cases when they have), many of the papers presented at conferences have subsequently been published as articles in special issues of more general pottery/ceramics magazines. Such was the case when several of the lectures presented at the 1999 'Different Stokes International Woodfire Conference' were published in a special 65-page supplement in the *Studio Potter* magazine, the following year.[12] The papers ranged from purely technical accounts to essays on aesthetic considerations of wood-fired ceramics, and biographical profiles combining both technical and aesthetic concerns.

12. *Studio Potter*, Vol. 28, No. 2, 2000.

### *The Log Book* – international wood-fired ceramics publication

*The Log* Book has been published quarterly since it was established by Coll Minogue and Robert Sanderson in February 2000.[13] Some 500 articles have been published to date – the vast majority of which are first person accounts written by potters and ceramic artists describing their personal experiences of and involvement in woodfiring, as well as discussing the motivation and inspiration for their work, and their aesthetic aims. A series of articles dealing with the subject of woodfire aesthetics published in *The Log Book* over several issues provided an extensive discussion of the subject.

The article that started the discussion was 'Questioning Wood-fired Aesthetics' by Ted Adler, based on the paper that he presented as a member of the Aesthetics Panel at the '20+1 years of the Tozan kilns' International Woodfire Conference at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, Arizona in 2006.[14] Adler critiqued the idea of 'wood-fired aesthetics', referencing 'the expressly Nippon-centric attitudes that pervade contemporary Western woodfire practice'. He proceeded by discussing the validity of the 'fusion of Eastern spirituality and Western expressionism in woodfiring'.

The following issue of *The Log Book* included an article by Adam Welch 'Excursus on Ted Adler's Essay on Wood-fired Aesthetics', in response to Adler's.[15] Welch stated that 'To believe that the West's woodfiring aesthetic is a combination of Japanese aesthetics and Abstract Expressionism is to neglect the divergence of aesthetics and misunderstands art theory'. He continued 'the uncritical acceptance of process toward making meaning is apparently losing credibility. The complaint about the dominance of Abstract Expressionism tendencies are real, however the circumstances that brought about Abstract Expressionism have changed; nevertheless, the ideas carry over'.

The debate continued in the next issue, with an input by Owen Rye 'Head or Heart', addressing the salient points in Adler's article, before coming to the conclusion that

13. *The Log Book* www.thelogbook.net
14. Ted Adler, 'Questioning Wood-fired Aesthetics', *The Log Book*, issue 29, 2007, pp.3–5.
15. Adam Welch, 'Excursus on Ted Adler's Essay on Wood-fired Aesthetics', *The Log Book*, issue 30, 2007, pp.9–13.

knowledge of, or engagement in, issues of critical theory are not prerequisites in the making of wood-fired work, as suggested by Adler.[16]

Adler responded to Rye's article in the following issue with 'Rye's Rejoinder', drawing that particular series of discussion on wood-fired aesthetics to a close, by returning to his original argument and reasserting his beliefs in a more concept-oriented approach to art making, compared to that promoted by Rye.[17]

While not stated explicitly, there appeared to be an implicit understanding throughout the series of articles that discussion was in this instance confined to woodfire aesthetics associated with long-duration firing in oriental style kilns.

In another series of articles on aesthetics published in *The Log Book* some years earlier, authors had addressed issues including consideration of 'inefficiency' in woodfiring and the possible beneficial outcomes in terms of aesthetics.[18] Although Jeff Shapiro, the author of the first article, fired in an anagama his discussion was relevant and could be applied to a broad range of different types of woodfire processes and wood-fired work.

In response to this article Tasmanian woodfirer Ben Richardson offered his thoughts on the subject, including his concern as to how to use 'the firing process to express the potential of my local materials to make objects that resonate and have relevance in my Western culture'.[19] Richardson raised issues concerning choices relating to length and method of firing including 'possible extremes of a blinkered commitment to efficiency and the indulgence of extreme inefficiency', and 'the challenge of balancing aesthetic goals with environmental responsibilities'.

Richardson was the only one of the authors to acknowledge that choices in materials, work, and length of firing can result in effects ranging from 'a light dusting of ash on a glaze [… to] an eroded, charred and fissured clay surface that conveys a sense of turmoil and intensity'.

16. Owen Rye, 'Head or Heart', *The Log Book*, issue 31, 2007, pp.26–29.
17. Ted Adler, 'Rye's Rejoinder', *The Log Book*, issue 32, 2007, pp.24–25.
18. Jeff Shapiro, 'Aesthetics of Woodfiring', *The Log Book*, issue 21, 2005, pp.8–11.
19. Ben Richardson, 'Aesthetic responses', *The Log Book*, issue 22, 2005, pp.25–26.

The same issue of the magazine contained an article by Japanese potter Hatori Makoto. In this article 'Beauty of Soul – Beauty of Form: Naturally-glazed Ceramics and Haiku', Makoto's basic premise was that the Japanese sense of aesthetics is a prerequisite in the creation and appreciation of naturally-glazed ceramics, stating:

> The naturally-glazed ceramic works seen in Europe and America do not possess this introspection of soul. The works emphasise only the ferocity of the ash accumulation, as though that were the essence of ceramics with natural ash glaze. In such expressionistic works, one may sense the griminess of the falling ash, but unfortunately one cannot discover in them the beauty of a spiritual world.[20]

Owen Rye's response, published in the following issue, addressed subjects raised in all three of the previous articles, but responded to Makoto's article at greater length, specifically asserting that the traditional Japanese approach to woodfiring and its aesthetic are not appropriate for a contemporary woodfirer in the West. Rye pointed out that it is up to the individual to make personal decisions in these matters rather than adhering to any prescribed rules.[21]

While there has not been an article in *The Log Book* focussing specifically on the woodfire aesthetics that are the subject of this thesis, many articles contain much of relevance to a discussion of the subject, from the viewpoints of both those who are adherents of an approach that involves long-duration firing, as well as those who are seeking quieter effects on their work. In 2008, in the first of what was to become an annual special issue (No. 33) focussing on a particular area of specialisation in woodfiring, articles were published by three potters – Linda Christianson, Micki Schloessingk and Sandy Lockwood – each of whom has long specialised in the area of wood-fired salt-glaze, seeking and achieving quieter effects in their work.

**General ceramics magazines**

The *Studio Potter* magazine has played a prominent role in presenting different types of woodfiring in terms of both methodologies and aesthetics from the earliest days of its publication in 1972. Early coverage of woodfiring appeared in the context of the energy

20. Hatori Makoto, 'Beauty of Soul Beauty of Form: Naturally-glazed Ceramics and Haiku', *The Log Book*, issue 22, 2005, pp.3–7.
21. Owen Rye, 'Aesthetics: Comment', *The Log Book*, issue 23, 2005, pp.14–16.

crisis of the early 1970s, but there was also reference to individual potter's aesthetic preferences and approaches in their work. One such article was Ruth Gowdy McKinley's (1931–1981) comprehensive sixteen-page account of her woodfiring practice, published in 1974. At a time when there was little information available on the subject of woodfiring in general, this article thoroughly documented the entire process from sourcing, storing and drying wood (essential considerations which are often ignored in descriptions of woodfiring); building the kiln and preparing it for firing; and also included a detailed firing schedule. Though hers was predominantly a technical account, Gowdy McKinley also included a description of her response to woodfiring, 'Over the years that I have fired with wood these variable effects of the wood ash have become more and more predictable and thus planned for. It is this variable and unique quality – the mark inherent to this fire – that continues to hold my interest, is often my delight, and that always demands my respect.'[22] Gowdy McKinley's work perfectly illustrated 'the quiet touch of the flame'. In her attention to every process and detail of making her glazed porcelain functional ware, her work bears comparison with that of Hanssen Pigott.

In the area of general ceramics magazines and coverage of different aspects of woodfiring, two special issues of two publications stand out. The first was the 1982 special issue of the *Studio Potter* (Vol. 11, No. 1), which had a significant impact, not only in the USA, but also overseas. It included the results of the first ever survey of contemporary woodfirers, in which the issue of woodfire aesthetics was raised, perhaps for the first time in print. Significantly the two opening images in 'A Portfolio of American Woodfired Pottery' were pieces that represent two very different approaches to woodfire aesthetics. The first, representative of quiet woodfire effects and subtle surfaces was a lidded jar by Karen Karnes, fired in a Bourry-box kiln. The second was a stack by Peter Voulkos, fired in Peter Callas' anagama. Considered side by side the contrast between these pieces is apparent, and serves to highlight the specific characteristics and attributes of both.

The second magazine was the August 1989 issue of *Pottery in Australia*. This featured twenty-one articles on numerous aspects of the subject, all of which were based on papers presented at the International Woodfire Conference that had taken place at Gulgong in NSW, in April of that year (referenced above).

22. Ruth Gowdy McKinley, 'The Mark of This Fire, *Studio Potter*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1974, pp.30–46.

Special woodfire issues of both of these journals were subsequently published. Many of the papers presented at the 1999 *Different Stokes* International Woodfire Conference were reproduced in the June 2000 issue of *Studio Pottery*. In April 2010 *The Journal of Australian Ceramics* (formerly *Pottery in Australia*) featured twelve articles on different aspects of woodfiring.

**Films, Videos and DVDs**

Films, Videos, and DVDs have become an important additional source of information on all aspects of woodfiring – increasingly by means of the Internet – where numerous films are to be found. Of relevance to this study are two French videos produced in the early 2000s about the pottery traditions and firing of large kilns in the Puisaye region, where the technology used was very similar to that of La Borne. In the first film *Puisaye de Terre et de feu* the characteristics of the local materials and the work produced from them were discussed, as well as early artist/potters including Jean Carriès and Paul Jeanneney. The second film *Grand Feu en Puisaye* documented the first firing in fifty years of the 100m$^3$ kiln at the Espace Céramique Jacques-Jeanneney in 2003 (see bibliography for details).[23]

**Theses**

Given the development of woodfiring as a discipline with associated aesthetic outcomes within the wider field of ceramics, and the proliferation of woodfire kilns in recent decades, it is surprising that there has not been more academic research focussing on aspects of the subject. I have succeeded in finding just one practice-led PhD thesis dealing with woodfiring aesthetics.[24] This is Ian Jones' *'Wabicha* and the Perception of Beauty in Wood-fired Ceramics'.

Jones, an Australian woodfirer, argues that 'the development of the philosophy of *wabi* in the period between 1450 and 1600 during the creation of the *wabi* Tea ceremony, *wabicha*', was 'the seminal process, which formed the aesthetic of woodfiring'.[25] The work that Jones

23. Both videos were reviewed in *The Log Book*, see Issues 16, 2003 and 20, 2005 respectively. A report of the firing documented in the 2005 video 'Poterie Jacques-Jeanneney', by Coll Minogue was published in *The Log Book*, Issue 16, 2003, pp.13–20.
24. A second thesis – part of a practice-led PhD on wood-fired ceramics has become available online in recent months (accessed April 2019). It is *Metamorphosis and Morphogenesis – Explorations of weathering in wood-fired ceramics*, by Sandra Lockwood, University of Wollongong, Australia, 2018.
25. Ian Jones, 'Wabicha and the Perception of Beauty in Woodfired Ceramics', unpublished PhD thesis, Australian National University Canberra, 2016.

referenced was natural ash glazed from long-duration firings, the effects that he discussed in contemporary practices being achieved in a variety of modern kiln designs, in addition to those based on traditional Japanese models.

So far there has not been a specialist publication with a focus on the aesthetics associated with the different genres of wood-fired work that have been produced in the context of the woodfire revival that has been in progress for the past fifty to sixty years. This applies both to work from long-duration firing in kilns designed for this process, and also work displaying subtle woodfire effects.

## Part 2 – A review of literature on and by the three case studies

### Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie

Pleydell-Bouverie's work, together with that of Norah Braden with whom she worked in partnership from 1928 to 1936, was the subject of critical reviews in both specialist art publications and general newspapers, particularly in the early stages of her career. The most extensive of these was 'English Stoneware Pottery by Miss K. Pleydell-Bouverie and Miss D.K.N. Braden', by W. A. Thorpe, published in *Artwork*, in 1930.[26] The work of both potters was received favourably in this and other reviews, and in common with that of some of their contemporaries was discussed within the broader context of fine arts.

The chief sources of information about Pleydell-Bouverie's life and work are the catalogues published to coincide with the two major retrospective exhibitions that have been shown to date, one during her lifetime (1980), the second in 1986, the year following her death. The first of these, *Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie*, published on the occasion of the exhibition held at the Crafts Study Centre at the Holburne of Menstrie Museum, University of Bath, consists of a foreword and introduction by Barley Roscoe (Assistant Keeper at the Craft Study Centre), essays by potters Michael Cardew and Henry Hammond, and Pleydell-Bouverie herself, as well as a selection of her clay and glaze recipes.

The second more extensive publication, *Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie: A Potter's Life 1895–1985*, was produced by the Crafts Council in association with the Craft Study Centre in Bath,

26. W. A. Thorpe, 'English Stoneware Pottery by Miss K. Pleydell-Bouverie and Miss D.K.N. Braden', *Artwork*, VI Winter 1930, pp.257–265.

where another exhibition of Pleydell-Bouverie's work was held. It included an introduction, again by Roscoe, and essays by Pleydell-Bouverie's cousin Doris Pleydell-Bouverie, and potters Henry Hammond and Richard Batterham, providing both biographical and technical documentation. A substantial number of Pleydell-Bouverie's glaze recipes were included, preceded by an introduction by Emmanuel Cooper.

Two articles by Pleydell-Bouverie on the technical aspects of 'Wood and Vegetable Ashes in Stoneware Glazes' were published in *Ceramic Review* in 1970 (numbers 5 and 6. Both articles were subsequently reproduced in the catalogue of the 1986 exhibition at the Craft Study Centre). The information in these articles is delivered in a straightforward, matter of fact, no nonsense manner, providing sufficient details for anyone interested in the subject to carry out their own research. The catalogue also contained copies of some of the letters written by Pleydell-Bouverie to Bernard Leach, in which she discussed, amongst other matters, her own and Leach's work, including technical issues concerning kilns, wood supply, firing, exhibitions, and the aesthetics of contemporary pottery and art.

Both of these Craft Study Centre publications included accounts of Pleydell-Bouverie's working methods, including her woodfire kiln and firings, in the main essays. Discussion about the aesthetics of her work was present in terms of the glaze qualities that she achieved, but without specific reference to the role of woodfiring, apart from Cardew's comment (in the 1980 publication) that 'The epic days of her wood-fired stoneware now belong to the past. But their place in the history of English pottery is secure'.[27]

Pleydell-Bouverie's work and research in ash glazes were the subject of a chapter section (eight pages) in the book *Ash Glazes*, by Phil Rogers published in 1991, in which the importance of her research was emphasised and discussed within the broader context of this specialist field. Several of her pots were illustrated and corresponding glaze recipes included.[28]

It is perhaps from her letters that most insight can be gained into Pleydell-Bouverie's attitude to her work, as well as a range of other subjects. Her correspondence has been

27. Michael Cardew, 'St. Ives and Coleshill Days', *Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie*, Crafts Study Centre, 1980, p.13.
28. Phil Rogers, *Ash Glazes*, A & C Black, 1991.

described as 'humorous, down-to-earth, but often profound'.[29] The letters show Pleydell-Bouverie to be an astute observer and commentator, who was not afraid to give her opinion on topics including work by contemporary potters William Staite Murray, and Charles and Nell Vyse.

In addition to the letters from Pleydell-Bouverie to Bernard Leach (in the Leach Archive in the Craft Study Centre, Farnham), another source of her letters has become available in recent years. During the course of his research on potter and kiln builder Matsubayashi Tsurunosuke, the Japanese academic and scholar Maezaki Shinya discovered nineteen letters in the Matsubayashi family archive, written to Matsubayashi by Pleydell-Bouverie. All were published for the first time in 2011, in the Appendix to an article by Maezaki.[30]

These letters provide valuable information as to the extent of Matsubayashi's input into the development of Pleydell-Bouverie's practice, from supplying materials and equipment, to on-going and extensive technical advice about the firing of her kiln, clay preparation, use of glaze materials, and other technical matters.[31] They also provide an insight into the early years of Pleydell-Bouverie's practice, the technical difficulties she experienced and her attitude and approach to this aspect of her work.

Pleydell-Bouverie's work has recently been discussed in *Things of Beauty Growing*, the catalogue of the major exhibition of British studio pottery that originated at the Yale Center for British Art. It is referenced in the context of 'the subtle variations of colour' in her glaze experiments, and the fact that she 'kept true to the Song "standard", not only during its most influential period in the 1920s and 1930s, but also throughout her long life, with a sure rootedness in both place and nature'.[32]

29. Tony Birks and Cornelia Wingfield Digby in *Bernard Leach, Hamada & their Circle from the Wingfield Digby Collection*, Phaidon Christie's, 1990, p.139.
30. Matsubayashi Tsurunosuke and British Studio Pottery 1924-1928: Letters from Bernard Leach, Michael Cardew, Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie and Ada Mason', by Shinya Maezaki, *English Ceramic Circle Transactions*, No. 22, 2011, pp.117–148.
31. Of the nineteen letters written by Pleydell-Bouverie that are preserved in the Asahi Pottery Archive, the first ten were written while she was still in St Ives (with dates from 7th August to 26th November 1924). The remaining nine have the Coleshill address, and the last letter is dated 30th September 1927.
32. *Things of Beauty Growing*, Yale University Press, 2017, p.238.

While none of the sources considered above made specific reference to the contribution that the process of woodfiring made to the qualities that Pleydell-Bouverie achieved in her glazes, there were frequent references to the overall quiet qualities of her work and the depth and richness of her glazes.

**Jacqueline Lerat**

Almost all of the literature that has been published both about and by Jacqueline Lerat is in the French language. The main sources are the two full-length books that have been written about her, and two others about both her and her husband Jean. All were published to coincide with exhibitions.

The first book about Jacqueline was *Jacqueline Lerat – une œuvre en mouvement,* published in 2010 to coincide the major retrospective of her work shown at Centre Céramique Contemporaine de La Borne.[33] It included essays on different aspects of her life and work by family members, colleagues, collectors, and academics, as well as lengthy extracts from her journals. Combined, these texts provide a comprehensive documentation of Jacqueline's life and practice as well as insights into her creative process and inspiration. The atmospheric illustrations of her later work in this volume clearly demonstrate its quiet surface effects, individual pieces evoking a mood of quietness.

The second book *Jacqueline Lerat L'Être et la Forme* – published by the National Ceramics Museum at Sèvres, coincided with the larger retrospective shown there in 2012.[34] The essays in this volume, mostly by critics, academics, and art historians, considered Jacqueline's work in a range of contexts, including architecture and painting, providing further insights, analysis and discussion of her work, together with biographical documentation, placing her life and work in the context of the broader political and artistic landscapes of her time.

Another large-scale exhibition, this time including the work of both Jean and Jacqueline was shown at Galerie Capazza in Nançay, (Cher Department) later in 2012. This was also accompanied by a book *Jean et Jacqueline Lerat* – containing texts by the poet Bernard Noël,

33. *Jacqueline Lerat – Une œuvre en mouvement*, Éditions La Revue de la Céramique et du Verre, 2010.
34. *Jacqueline Lerat L'Être et la Forme*, Sèvres Cité de la Céramique, 2012.

which had previously been published in the first book about the couple, on the occasion of an exhibition at La Maison de la Culture de Bourges in 1994,[35] and other writers.[36]

In 2012 an exhibition *La Borne 1940–1980 A Postwar movement of ceramic expression in France*, was shown at the Magen H Gallery in New York (USA) and a bi-lingual book (French and English) with the same title was published to coincide with it.[37] This was the first English text to situate the ceramics produced by the group of artists, all of whom had connections with La Borne from the 1940s, in the context of Modernism.

This theme of the significance of the ceramics produced by the artists who were early arrivals in La Borne was again addressed in the exhibition and publication *Les Pionniers de la ceramique modern La Borne*, in 2018.[38] Here the work produced by the Lerats and their colleagues was analysed in the context of contemporary developments in connected disciplines including architecture, design, and the fine arts.

In the book *8 artistes et la terre* (Éditions ARgile, 2009), Jacqueline was profiled in the context of work by seven other contemporary artists, all of whom were from a younger generation. Seeing her work in this context, amongst artists who were engaged in projects that included experimental installations within landscapes, often on a vast scale, frequently combining other materials with clay, added a new dimension to it. The artists shared concerns including architecture and exploring the fundamental qualities of the material that was their common link. In her essay Jacqueline focussed on various seminal stages in her career, the most prevalent influences on her work, and her approach to it.

Jacqueline wrote several articles about her kiln and the process of firing, as well as the impact of woodfiring on her work. In accounts of her work she focussed on the creative process – the drawing sequences and thought processes that were integral aspects of her practice, as well as the interests in her life that fed her creativity. Her writing has a particularly evocative quality, even when she is discussing essentially technical subjects,

35. Bernard Noël, *J.J. Lerat – céramistes*, Éditions Cercle d'Art, 1994.
36. Bernard Noël, et. al*., Jean et Jacqueline Lerat*, Galerie Capazza, 2012.
37. Maud Leonhardt Santini, and Hugues Magen, *La Borne 1940–1980 – A Postwar Movement of Ceramic Expression in France*, Magen H Gallery, 2012.
38. Dominique Deyber, et al., *Les pionniers de la céramique modene La Borne*, Édition Ville de Bourges Musées, 2018.

such as her article 'Four Sèvres', based on a firing of her kiln in Bourges in the book *Paroles de feu, les fours à bois en France*, which was published in 2000.[39]

Jacqueline contributed many articles to the French ceramics magazine, *La Revue de la Céramique et du Verre*, on topics ranging from 'Bernard Leach, *A Potter's Book*, une recontre', in which she discussed Leach's visit to La Borne in 1951, and his subsequent gift of a signed copy of his book to her and her husband Jean, and how they responded to it (No. 130, 2003), to her 'Homage à Yves Mohy', a colleague of long-standing who had worked in La Borne early in his career (No. 145, 2005).

In 2018 a new edition of a DVD *L'être et la Forme Rencontre avec Jacqueline Lerat Céramiste*, a film by Jeanne Hadorn which was originally produced in 2007 in French, was published with English subtitles. This film showed Jacqueline in her studio, home, and garden, and provided an insight into the creative process involved in making her work. Also in 2018, a 40-minute DVD was published showing a choreography in which two dancers responded to the themes explored in Jacqueline's work, exploring the essence of her work in the setting of her garden.

*Je suis debout – Jacqueline Lerat*, a book about Jacqueline's work by Joseph Rossetto a collector who became a close friend, was also published in 2018.[40] Rossetto responded to Jacqueline's work, tracing its development through drawings in her sketchbooks and texts in her notebooks.

There is much in the sources listed here on Jacqueline Lerat's use of the process of woodfiring to achieve particular qualities on the surfaces of her work. There is also much on the power and impact of her later work, and its ability to create an emotional response in the viewer, to impress upon them the concerns and themes which were motivations for Jacqueline in creating these pieces.

39. Claude Vacher (editor), *Paroles de feu, les fours à bois en France*, Musée Bernard Palissy, 2000.
40. Joseph Rossetto, *Je suis debout – Jacqueline Lerat*, Éditions Mercier & Associés, 2018.

**Gwyn Hanssen Pigott**

The written sources available for Gwyn Hanssen Pigott include numerous articles in ceramics magazines dating from the 1960s onwards – *Pottery in Australia, Ceramic Review, Studio Potter, Ceramics Art and Perception, Ceramics Technical, The Log Book*, and many others. The single most comprehensive publication, and the only one to date focussing exclusively on Hanssen Pigott's work (apart from short publications associated with solo exhibitions), is the catalogue of her 2005 fifty-year retrospective exhibition, shown at the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne. This contained several essays by craft historians, curators, and other academics, and was illustrated throughout with images of Hanssen Pigott, her studios, and examples of the work she had made over the previous fifty years of her career. The aesthetic aims and impact of her work were discussed in some of the essays and the role played by woodfiring is mentioned briefly in a few instances.

Hanssen Pigott had from the start of her career written about her own work in many comprehensive articles and artists' statements. These texts contributed much to its promotion and understanding. There were also detailed first person narratives – notably 'Autobiographical Notes', published in *Studio Potter* magazine (USA) in December 1991, and 'Notes from Netherdale' published in *Ceramics Art and Perception* (Aus.) in 1997. In the first of these – a text of some 7,000 words – Hanssen Pigott recounted every stage in her life and career from birth, right up to the time the article was written. This autobiographical account is the source most frequently quoted in all subsequent biographical information, including exhibition catalogue essays, and more general articles about her and her work.

A film, *Gwyn Hanssen Pigott – a potters film*, which was produced during the second firing of Hanssen Pigott's new woodfire kiln at her studio in Ipswich, Queensland in 2008, allowed 'a rare opportunity to observe work in progress, giving an insight into the processes' involved in producing her still life arrangements.[41] An interview conducted with Hanssen Pigott, which was used as the soundtrack to the film provided further insight to her work, including her views on the qualities that woodfiring contributed to the glaze of individual pieces and her assemblages overall.

41. Coll Minogue, review of *Gwyn Hanssen Pigott – a potters film*, *The Log Book*, Issue 36, 2008, p.35.

In her writings Hanssen Pigott frequently referenced the role of woodfiring in her work. In a sense she was subtly educating readers, writers, researchers, and curators, not only on the technical aspects of the process itself, but from an aesthetic viewpoint regarding the unique effects that woodfiring contributed to the work. This then was a feature to be sought out and better understood in the finished pieces.

Of the three potters and artists Hanssen Pigott left more in terms of written analysis of her work from philosophical and aesthetic standpoints than the others. She wrote at length about the development of the range of work produced during the later phase of her career and with which this thesis is concerned. Many texts exist on this subject, written by Hanssen Pigott herself in artist statements, or essays, or quoted by her during interviews that form the basis of articles about her work by other authors. In the early stages of the production of this work it may have been that she felt it necessary to justify or validate it in some way – as it was in such stark contrast to that which had preceded it, not in terms of the component vessels, which were familiar to those who had followed her work, but in the manner in which they were arranged. It was this aspect of the work that could be described as being somewhat revolutionary.

Amongst the many accounts and references to this development in Hanssen Pigott's work there are some that conflict, not necessarily in terms of the facts surrounding the event, but concerning the exact chronological sequence. Thus, in one account, Hanssen Pigott referenced the placement of 'three inseparable bowls' in an exhibition as being the genesis of the 'groupings',[42] whereas in another she cited the grouping of work that had been fired in her colleague Heja Chong's kiln in 1988, as being responsible for, and marking the beginning of the sequence of events that led to the new way of considering and arranging her work in still lives.[43] However, in the first of these sources Hanssen Pigott also stated: 'Later, (was it? the story could be told in many ways) came the still life groupings.'

Having taken the major step of showing her work in a new way and insisting precisely on how it was to be shown, Hanssen Pigott continued to discuss it in her writing as it evolved and changed, notably in an article that was first published in the USA in 1997, and

42. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, 'Notes from Netherdale' *Ceramics Art and Perception*, No. 27, 1997, p.80.
43. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, quoted in Minogue and Sanderson, 2000, p.18.

reproduced in the UK seven years later, with the addition of some technical notes.[44] In this article she addressed questions of 'truth in form' and 'rightness in form'; aspects involved in the making of the individual forms that eventually constituted the still lifes – what was considered at each stage of the process; the glazes that she used and discussion of the actual process of creating the arrangements from the fired individual vessels forms. The glazed included 'feldspathic types (which like wet stone catch the light at each turn, and leave stronger traces of the flame's path in the kiln). And these shadowy matt surfaces may demand a quieter form – silent, and gentle and thoughtful'. In this article Hanssen Pigott also wrote regarding her earlier arrangements that 'some, alas, seem awkward or pretentious now to my changed eyes'.

One of the topics with which Hanssen Pigott continued to engage in her writing was the apparent conceptual contradiction of making eminently usable functional household vessels, and then denying the possibility for function by placing them in arrangements that were intended to be permanent. She also wrote about the work of other artists, frequently colleagues whose work was similar to her own, including Neville French and Prue Venables. This writing was most often in the form of essays in exhibition catalogues, but also included insightful reports on events such as the 1990 woodfire event 'La Borne en Feu'.[45]

An additional resource that was very useful in my research on Hanssen Pigott was the recordings of interviews made as part of the British Library National Life Stories Crafts Lives Collection. Conducted over four days in June and July 2013, these interviews include extensive information of relevance to Hanssen Pigott's practice and philosophy, in addition to detailed biographical material.[46]

The body of writing that Hanssen Pigott left is sufficient both in quantity and depth to ensure that those who engage in continued analysis of her work and her place in the history of the development of ceramics in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries will have extensive sources on which to base their research.

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44. Published as, 'Pulled-Back Simplicity', in *Studio Potter*, Vol. 26. No.1, Dec. 1997, and as, 'The Rightness of Form', in *Ceramic Review*, No. 207, May/June 2004.
45. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, 'La Borne en Feu – Impressions of a French Woodfire Conference', *Ceramics Art and Perception*, Issue 3, 1991.
46. The interviews were recorded on 24th/25th/27th June and 2nd July 2013. http://sounds.bl.uk/Oral-history/Crafts

**Summary**

The research undertaken in this study is the first to identify specific subtle woodfire aesthetics as an area of research, and to discuss the subject in depth. Almost all of the literature reviewed above has been utilised in the study. Apart from the one thesis that has been referenced, there has not been an academic study of woodfire aesthetics in relation to contemporary Western practices (and that is specifically on woodfire aesthetics connected to long duration firing).

In the context of wood-fired work produced in the West from the start of the studio pottery movement, there has not been critical examination in the literature of subtle wood-fired work either glazed or unglazed – the types of work with which this thesis is concerned, and little has been written on the associated aesthetics.

Concerning the published literature on the three potters / artists on whose work the current study is focussed, while there are some references to the role that the woodfire process played in their practices, and its impact on their particular aesthetic approaches, in the case of both Jacqueline Lerat and Gwyn Hanssen Pigott they have themselves written more on this aspect of their work than other commentators.

## Chapter 1 – Introduction

The question of what exactly is meant by the term 'wood-fired' has become open to interpretation since individual studio potters in the West first employed the technique in the early twentieth century. It has sometimes been interpreted as describing work made from stoneware clay or porcelain, which having been placed in the kiln unglazed, is affected by flame and flyash generated by the burning wood during firing – in other words, natural ash-glazed, or kiln-glazed work. With the prevalence of work fired in anagama kilns during the 1980s and 1990s the term 'wood-fired' appeared to become synonymous with 'anagama-fired', to the exclusion of work fired in other types of woodfire kilns with the aim of achieving a wide range of different effects.

Similarly, 'woodfire aesthetic' or 'the aesthetics of woodfire' was interpreted by some as referring to the aesthetic associated with long-duration firings in anagama exclusively, and was sometimes termed 'the anagama aesthetic'. Such views ignore the fact that there are many other reasons for firing with wood. Since the early days of the studio pottery movement in the West, potters have wood-fired with the aim of achieving a range of aesthetic outcomes in their work, a situation that continues today.

This thesis is concerned with ranges of work that exemplify a quiet or subtle woodfire aesthetic, work that is often fired in kilns, the designs of which are European in origin, relatively small in scale, during cycles that are typically no longer than thirty-six hours in duration.

When considering the broad subject of wood-fired ceramics and associated aesthetics over the span of the twentieth century, it should be noted that woodfire aesthetics in relation to contemporary, rather than historical work, did not emerge as a subject of discussion in ceramics literature the West until relatively late in the century. Prior to that the merits of particular work, including wood-fired work, were considered without specific reference to the firing processes used. Glaze qualities were similarly discussed without necessarily referring to the specifics of particular woodfire effects. It was as a result of the increased popularity of the process of woodfiring in the West that discussion of woodfire aesthetics developed, and it was only from the early 1980s, when specialist conferences on the subject of woodfiring began to take place, that discussion on woodfire aesthetics published.

Much of this discussion – both at specialist conferences and in the literature – has been based on aesthetics associated with woodfire work from long–duration firing, bearing evidence of the intensity of the process, and frequently characterised by heavy layers of natural ash glaze, encrustations of ash, distortion, cracks and scars. In contrast there has been little discussion, either at conference level or in the literature, of aesthetics associated with subtle woodfire effects achieved in shorter firing cycles – work displaying quiet flame markings, or the effects that are achievable on glazed surfaces through the process of woodfiring.

### 1.1: Background and research rationale

The term *The Quiet Touch of the Flame* – the title of this thesis, was first used in my published writing in an essay 'Woodfiring – An Introduction' an essay published in the catalogue of the *Different Stokes International Woodfire Exhibition*, which was shown at the University of Iowa Museum of Art in 1999. Adapted from the introduction to *Wood-fired Ceramics Contemporary Practices*, the book that I co-authored with Robert Sanderson, which was published in 2000,[1] in the essay I stated:

> Current practices in wood-firing embrace a diversity of styles of work, of kilns; and of fired effects. Some potters seek 'the quiet touch of the flame' accentuating glazes, or giving subtle ash effects on unglazed surfaces. Others combine woodfiring and salt or soda glazing to achieve satisfying effects. Yet others want their work to really look wood-fired, bearing evidence of the intensity of the fire over many days of high temperature firing. There are also those who refire their work many times, building up layer upon layer on the surface, until they are satisfied with the fired results.[2]

As far as I am aware this is the first time that the term 'The Quiet Touch of the Flame' had been used in relation to contemporary woodfire practices, to describe a particular range of effects and associated aesthetics. 'The Quiet Touch of the Flame' was also the title of a panel that I moderated at the 'Different Stokes' International Woodfire conference, held at the University of Iowa (from 29th September to 2nd October 1999). A synopsis of my contribution as moderator of this panel was published in the conference proceedings,

1. Coll Minogue and Robert Sanderson, *Wood-fired Ceramics – Contemporary Practices*, A & C Black, 2000.
2. Coll Minogue, 'Woodfiring – An Introduction', *Different Stokes International Woodfire Exhibition* catalogue, The University of Iowa School of Art and Art History Ceramic Area, 1999, page 9.

under the title 'The Quiet Touch of the Flame'.[3] The aim of the panel discussion was to present a range of work fired in a variety of woodfire kilns, both Eastern and Western in design, all of which displayed effects that were at the quieter end of the wood-fired ceramics spectrum.

By the time that both 1999 Iowa publications had appeared, and *Wood-fired Ceramics Contemporary Practices* published some months later, I had been involved in woodfiring and the specialist field of wood-fired ceramics for some sixteen years, having been introduced to the process whilst working with woodfire potter, author and publisher Janet Mansfield in Australia, in the early 1980s. As I wrote of my own practice in 2000: 'I am attracted to prehistoric pottery, particularly the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age pottery of Ireland and Britain and am interested in exploring fundamental methods of mark making in clay surfaces – marks which are quietly accentuated by flame and flyash during woodfiring.'[4]

Over the course of my career as an independent professional woodfire potter, in Scotland from 1984 to 2000, and since then as researcher, author, editor, and publisher (I am co-editor/publisher of *The Log Book*, the specialist international, educational, non-profit wood-fired ceramics journal, founded in 2000),[5] I have maintained a particular interest in and appreciation for work in the range of quiet wood-fired surfaces encompassing historical, traditional, and contemporary work. It has been an aim in my writing and presentations to promote a broad view of wood-fired ceramics and the many different ranges of work produced.

Surfaces with tones of rich orange flashing on a pale-fired clay body are for me the essence of work bearing evidence of 'the quiet touch of the flame'. This effect may be achieved by firing mainly in a neutral to oxidizing atmosphere (woodfire kilns naturally alternate from oxidation, to neutral, to reduction upon stoking) and can, in a historical context, be seen on the orange flashed pots which are typical of the stonewares produced in Germany in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (see Figure 2, page 43). Fine examples of such pottery are to be seen in some of the paintings by Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1525–1569) from the 1560s.

3. *Different Stokes International Woodfire conference* proceedings, The University of Iowa School of Art and Art History Ceramic Area, unpaginated. Other panel members were Svend Bayer, UK, and Daphne Hatcher, USA.
4. Minogue and Sanderson, 2000, p30.
5. www.thelogbook.net With some 500 articles published to date, *The Log Book* is the single most extensive resource on the subjects of woodfiring and wood-fired ceramics in the English language.

The stoneware produced in central France from the fifteenth century, and continuing up to the 1960s, displays similarly quiet woodfire effects (see Figure 1, page 43). Both of these ranges of work represent a European tradition in woodfiring.

My interest in work in the field of woodfiring, both contemporary and historical, exemplifying a subtle woodfire aesthetic that is expressive of quietness, led to consideration of the overall mood that such work is capable of evoking and a questioning of how woodfire effects can contribute to this mood. Taking the descriptive term 'quiet' further, to not only describe an effect achievable in a woodfire kiln on a raw clay or glazed surface, but as encapsulating the aesthetics of a type or types of work that embody this quality, and in which these effects are inherent.

### 1.2: The research question

This thesis is concerned with aesthetic outcomes resulting from specific approaches to the process of woodfiring, which I am terming 'The Quiet Touch of the Flame'. The aesthetic aims and work of three individual potters and artists that embody this descriptive term, and to which it can appropriately be applied, are its central focus. They are Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie (1895–1985), Jacqueline Lerat (1920–2009), and Gwyn Hanssen Pigott (1935–2013).

The term 'quiet' is being interpreted here as expressed in: a restrained or understated manner; unobtrusive; not bright or showy; and 'subtle', delicately complex and understated. Quiet/subtle – the opposite to spectacle.

The woodfire effects that the makers achieved contributed to qualities that are responsible for an overall sense of quietness in their work. Thus, in the context of this study, the use of the term 'quiet' extends beyond a reference to wood-fired characteristics and has a relevance to the overall mood evoked by the work – whether pots, vessels, sculptures, or installations.

This thesis argues that:
**1.** In employing original creative approaches to produce innovative ranges of work incorporating woodfire methodologies that resulted in quiet surface effects, the three potters/artists created vessels and forms that evoke an overall sense of quietness.

**2.** Their influence extended beyond the specialist areas of woodfiring and wood-fired ceramics into the broader field of contemporary ceramics.

**3.** There was a pioneering aspect to their involvement not only in woodfiring, but pottery in general, making their practices significant from other perspectives, including:

- the periods when they began woodfiring and exploring the potential it offered for the development of their work
- the designs of kilns that they used
- the research they carried out

It is an aim of this thesis is to contribute to research on the methodologies and associated aesthetic outcomes of high-temperature wood-fired ceramics produced in the West in the twentieth/twenty-first centuries. This involves analysis of the subject from different perspectives, including: defining the characteristics that inform woodfire practice; examining the reasons behind the relatively sudden growth in popularity of the woodfire process that occurred in the second half of the twentieth century; demonstrating the significance of work with quiet and subtle woodfire effects and aesthetic outcomes in wood-fired ceramics; and evaluating the impact of this work within the broader context of ceramics practice.

The particular aesthetics associated with woodfiring and wood-fired ceramics with which this thesis is concerned have not hitherto been the subject of sustained academic research. That woodfiring contributed to the overall effects achieved in the work of the three individual potters and artists, evoking a sense of quietness, has likewise not been addressed. Their pioneering woodfire practices, spanning the period from 1924 to 2013, have not been considered in a single study.

### 1.3: Rationale for choice of potters/artists

The potters whose work is the focus of this study are all women woodfire practitioners. As a professional woodfire potter, having attended and participated in specialist international woodfire conferences from 1989 onwards, I gradually became interested in researching the experiences and practices of my fellow woodfirers, both male and female. This led to the realisation that women potters had been involved in the area of high-temperature

woodfiring since the earliest days of the studio pottery movement in the West in the 1920s, and I subsequently developed a particular research interest in early women woodfirers – the pioneers.

I have been presenting lectures, moderating panels, and leading roundtable discussions on different aspects of women's woodfire practice, historical and contemporary at international ceramics conferences since 2005. The primary aim of this research and discussion has been to illustrate the diversity of approaches to woodfiring practiced by women woodfirers, and identify and contextualise their contributions, both within woodfiring and the broader field of contemporary international ceramics practice.

When, in my role as co-editor/publisher of *The Log Book*, I was invited to give the closing talk at the Gundaroo International Woodfire conference (NSW, Australia) in 2005, I chose to concentrate on contemporary women woodfirers in the USA, with particular focus on the younger generation. The following year I proposed and moderated an all-woman panel (with six members from Norway, Wales, Ireland and the USA) at the International Woodfire Conference at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, USA. Since the first woodfire conference was held in New York in 1983, to the best of my knowledge an all woman panel had never previously presented at one of these specialist events.

I presented a paper on 'Women Woodfirers – the pioneers in the context of the studio pottery movement', at the Sturt International Woodfire Conference at Sturt Craft Centre, Mittagong (NSW, Australia), in 2008. At the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts (NCECA) annual conference in Phoenix, Arizona, in 2009, I gave a forty-minute lecture on 'International Women Woodfire Pioneers in the twentieth century'. In presenting the work of the earlier women woodfirers one of my aims has been to provide a context for the work of contemporary women woodfirers, and to encourage interest in the work of women woodfirers past, and present.

The current study thus combines two of my research interests, subtle woodfire aesthetics and the work of women woodfire potters and artists, particularly the pioneers in the field. When I determined to carry out research on this particular area of woodfire aesthetics, it seemed natural to select work with which I was already familiar that was representative of

such aesthetics, as I was with that of the three makers who are now the focus of this study. It was my wish to concentrate on the work of a limited number of makers whose practices between them spanned the major part of the twentieth century. Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie's woodfire practice began in 1925 and came to an end at the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, just four years before Jacqueline Bouvet's (Lerat) involvement in woodfiring began in France in 1943, a practice that continued for 65 years. On the other side of the world in Australia, Gwyn John (Hanssen Pigott) was introduced to the process of woodfiring on beginning her apprenticeship in 1955. Her woodfire practice continued right up to the time of her death in 2013.

I also wished to choose makers from a wide geographical spread, and not to limit my choices to English speaking countries exclusively. Thus, those that I chose are from Britain, France, and Australia. It should be stated at the outset that I am primarily concerned with the work produced during specific periods of the artists and potters' careers, and not with their entire œuvres.

The three makers had in common the fact that woodfiring was an integral part of their early training and continued as an important aspect of their work – in the case of two throughout their long careers, and for the third during the period when what is widely acknowledged as her best work was produced. Though they worked in different countries, using different kilns and materials, the work produced by all three is characterised by what I have chosen to refer to as the Quiet Touch of the Flame. Additionally, the work of these three makers was chosen as I consider that their use of variations of the process of woodfiring has resulted in specific qualities, which contribute to the power of their work in less easily definable ways – evoking a mood or atmosphere of quietness.

**Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie**

Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie was Bernard Leach's first female student at his pottery in St Ives, Cornwall, and his second student. It is likely that she was the first independent female studio potter in the West to establish a workshop incorporating a woodfire kiln for firing to high temperatures. The workshop was established and her kiln built in 1925, the year after she left St Ives. Pleydell-Bouverie spent her entire career systematically researching the formulation and composition of ash glazes created from an extensive range of organic

materials, and is widely recognised for her pioneering work in this field and the glaze qualities that she achieved.

This study focuses on that period early in Pleydell-Bouverie's career during which she produced wood-fired ash-glazed pots in the context of the emerging Modernist movement of the interwar period. These unassuming and austere forms owed much to what was Pleydell-Bouverie's primary source of inspiration – the pottery of Sung dynasty China, examples of which were only becoming available in increasing quantities in the West in the early decades of the twentieth century. Pleydell-Bouverie's work exemplifies the characteristics of Modernism – of subtle matt surfaces and understated decorative treatments. By the early 1930s just a few years into her practice as a potter, her work was being lauded in reviews in the national press by respected art critics from publications including *The Times*, and was being considered on a par with fine art.

Pleydell-Bouverie's work as a pioneer in the field of high temperature glazed wood-fired work is of importance in the context of the emerging studio pottery movement. Her best pieces, consisting of simplified forms including bowls, large vases and bottles inspired by classic Chinese models, complemented by a range of glazes in tones redolent of natural surfaces have a contemplative air about them that evoke a sense of quiet and peacefulness. Her work is thus appropriate for analysis in the context of this study, exemplifying pieces in which wood-fired surfaces contribute to the power of particular forms to portray a sense of quietude.

Although she continued producing ash-glazed pieces for the remainder of her career after she ceased woodfiring, the glaze qualities of Pleydell-Bouverie's later work are not as highly regarded as those of her wood-fired pieces.

**Jacqueline Lerat**

With a history of woodfiring that can be traced back to the fifteenth century, the small village of La Borne in the Cher Department in central France has played an important role in the development of woodfiring in the West in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It was considered appropriate therefore, that one of the makers whose work was to be

examined in this study, should be somebody who initially trained and later worked in the area, as Jacqueline Lerat did for her entire professional career.

Lerat produced a wide range of work during her long and distinguished career – from early pieces heavily influenced by traditional French pottery, to the Modernist abstract sculptural forms of her later years. The work that will be examined here was created in the sixteen years from 1992 until 2008, the year before Lerat's death. It was during this period that what is widely considered as her most powerful sculptures were produced. These forms, which vary in scale from the modest to some measuring up to a metre high, have a monumentality that commands space, while exuding an atmosphere of calmness and quiet.

All of Lerat's work was wood-fired in *Sèvres* type kilns, with the lightly ashed surfaces that are associated with this design of kiln perfectly accentuating her sculptural forms, which were otherwise generally unglazed. These forms, which were created slowly by gradually building up with small pieces of clay, reward observation over time as new characteristics, are revealed on each viewing.

It is only very recently that the importance of the work produced by the group of artists who settled in La Borne and its environs in the immediate post World War II period is being recognised.[6] While there is currently a growing interest by a number of researchers and academics in the subject, there has however been little discussion of this work in English language publications. In the context of the development of ceramic sculpture in Europe in the twentieth century, and its acceptance as a recognised art form, both Jacqueline Lerat and her husband Jean played major and pioneering roles.

**Gwyn Hanssen Pigott**

Gwyn Hanssen Pigott was undoubtedly one of the best-known ceramic artists of the twentieth century. She trained and worked with four of the most important figures of the early studio pottery movement, in both the UK and Australia.

6. The work of these artists was the subject of a major exhibition (and accompanying publication) *Les Pionniers de la Céramique Moderne La Borne*, shown at the Musée des Arts Decoratifs, Bourges in 2018.

Her practice took place in three separate countries and she produced several different ranges of work, culminating in still life installations and assemblages, inspired by the work of the Italian painter Giorgio Morandi (1890–1964), which earned her international acclaim. In this body of work the functional forms that had for decades been the basis of Hanssen Pigott's practice became still life components. These precisely thrown forms, made from porcelain and porcellaneous stoneware and glazed in subdued tones were embellished with fine deposits of flyash during firings in the Bourry-box type kilns that she used, contributing significantly to the overall mood of the work. It is this work produced during the last twenty-five years of Hanssen Pigott's career that is to be considered in this study.

Of the early wood-fired utilitarian work that Hanssen Pigott produced in France in the late 1960s to early 1970s, reference was already being made to its 'quiet peaceful quality' and 'the thoughtful and contemplative qualities of the pots' giving them 'a rare individuality which seeks not to shock or impress but to calm and reassure'.[7] These terms are equally relevant to all of Hanssen Pigott's subsequent work throughout its different phases, culminating in the still life assemblages.

The fact that she referred to this work produced during the later stage of her career as 'Still Lifes', clearly indicates Hanssen Pigott's intention in arranging the individual pieces in such a manner, but can also be interpreted as having a broader meaning – extending to the concept that contemplating the work can evoke a sense of stillness and quietness in the viewer. There are many references to this aspect of Hanssen Pigott's work, both in her own writing and that of other commentators.

The three makers on whose work this thesis is focused each achieved success at various stages of their careers. The popularity of Pleydell-Bouverie's work did not continue in the years immediately following her death, but it has however gradually become the subject of renewed interest in recent years. It would appear that the work that all three makers produced, imbued with qualities of quietness and calm, has increased resonance in the second decade of the twenty-first century, a reflection perhaps on the pace of contemporary life in the developed world.

7. Eileen Lewenstein and Emmanuel Cooper, 'Gwyn Hanssen Talking', *Ceramic Review*, No. 11, Sept./Oct. 1971, p.4.

## 1.4: Methodology

Biographical narrative is one of the methodological approaches used in this study. Consideration of individual experiences in the context of wider social and cultural realms is employed in an effort to gain insights into the work of the three makers. There are differing quantities of written material available on the three, both in terms of biographical information and literature on their work. The sources on Pleydell-Bouverie are limited, partly due perhaps to the fact that it is eighty years since her woodfire practice ceased. Almost all of the relevant texts on Jacqueline Lerat are in French. I am aware of the limits of biography and the need for other methodologies and approaches for a more complete account of the subject.

### Interviews

New research carried out for this thesis involved conducting interviews with primary sources – most significantly with Gwyn Hanssen Pigott during a visit to her studio in Queensland, Australia in May 2013, during which I assisted in the last firing of her kiln, just two months prior to her unexpected death. There had been occasional correspondence between us, by both letter and e-mail, for some two decades prior to that, particularly concerning woodfiring and kiln design. During an overnight visit by Hanssen Pigott to our home in 2004, she and I had long conversations about diverse aspects of ceramics, woodfiring, kilns, art in general, and her then current exhibition at Tate St Ives. Having these opportunities for interaction with Hanssen Pigott has contributed greatly to my understanding of the development of the different phases of her work, and the importance of woodfiring to her practice.

I conducted two lengthy interviews with François Lerat, Jacqueline Lerat's son, which were recorded at her former home in Bourges in October 2014. Correspondence has continued with François by e-mail and mail concerning particular aspects of his mother's work, as my research developed. François has freely shared with me his memories of his parents' work during his childhood, first in La Borne, and later in Bourges, thus providing a valuable insight into their early working practices. Since his mother's death, both François and his wife Esther Martinez have worked tirelessly to ensure that the legacy of his parents' work endures. He has been generous with his time in discussing his views as his extensive

research continues, not only on Jean and Jacqueline's work, but that of the wider group of potters and artists who were among the earliest to settle in La Borne from 1941.

François has also allowed me to access the vast personal archive that Jacqueline left – notebooks, diaries, sketchbooks, photographs, personal library, and artwork. Extending to several rooms in the former family home, the scale of this archive is overwhelming – particularly as all of the texts are in French. To survey all of this material would take an individual researcher many years to complete. However, even my somewhat limited study of these resources gave me an insight into Jacqueline's life and work that would never have been possible otherwise.

**Public archives**

My research on Hanssen Pigott involved visiting the Research Library of the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra (for eight days in August/September 2015), where I was able to access the entire 'Gwyn Hanssen Pigott Archive' consisting of 31 separate crates and boxes that had only recently been acquired by the Gallery, and was as yet undocumented. I was the first researcher to have access to this archive in its entirety prior its documentation. Access to this resource provided an opportunity to learn of aspects of Hanssen Pigott's life and work that were previously unavailable in the public domain. One aspect of the archive, which was of particular interest to me and relevant for my research, was the private correspondence from fellow potters including Warren MacKenzie and Michael Cardew, in which they gave their opinions of Hanssen Pigott's work. The sheer quantity of the material available in this archive was again overwhelming, especially in the limited time that was available to me.

My research on Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie included visiting the archives of the Craft Study Centre on the Farnham Campus of the University for the Creative Arts in Surrey (UK), where I accessed her original glaze notebook, and her letters to Bernard Leach, which now form part of the Leach Archive at the Centre. Having the opportunity to peruse the glaze notebook and to chart the development of her research on ash glazes and read her personal descriptions of the results was particularly enlightening and assisted in my understanding of the glaze qualities that she achieved.

Although some of Pleydell-Bouverie's letters to Leach are in print, there are several others in the archive which provided additional valuable information on many aspects of her practice, as well as her views on a wide range of related subjects.

**Art works**

Since embarking on the current research I have availed of many opportunities to see and study work by the three makers that are its focus. In addition to seeing and handling Pleydell-Bouverie's work at the Crafts Study Centre, I visited two exhibitions in which her pots were shown – *That Continuous Thing: Artists and the Ceramics Studio 1920 – Today* at Tate St Ives in 2017,[8] and *Things of Beauty Growing* at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge in 2018.[9]

The most significant opportunities I have had to study Jacqueline Lerat's work have been during three visits that I made to her former home in 2014, 2017 and 2018, as guest of her son François Lerat and his wife (for several days on each of the first two occasions). The Lerat family retains an extensive collection of Jean and Jacqueline's work from all phases of their careers. I also visited two major retrospective exhibitions of Jacqueline Lerat's work. The first *Jacqueline Lerat – Une œuvre en mouvement*, took place at the Centre Céramique Contemporaine de La Borne (CCCLB) in La Borne, France, from 4th September to 5th October 2010. The second, on an even larger scale, was shown in the galleries at Sèvres Cité de la Céramique, the French National Ceramics Museum in Paris, in October 2012.

Of particular significance was seeing the *Les Pionniers de la Céramique Moderne La Borne* exhibition shown at the Musée des Arts Decoratifs, Bourges in 2018, as it allowed an opportunity to view and consider Jacqueline work alongside and in the context of that produced by her contemporaries – the makers who were also attracted to live and work in La Borne in the 1940s and '50s, and who, like her, came from artistic backgrounds and became involved in producing abstract ceramic sculpture.

8. Pleydell-Bouverie's work was shown in one of the galleries at the Tate alongside that of Leach, and some of his students and associates.
9. The *Things of Beauty Growing – British Studio Pottery,* exhibition was first shown at the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut, USA, before travelling to the Fitzwilliam Museum.

During my two most recent visits to Australia (in 2013 and 2015), I have had many opportunities to study Gwyn Hanssen Pigott's work, ranging from the 1970s to some of her last pieces, in the homes of several collectors. On one memorable occasion a collector friend assembled a small Hanssen Pigott still life group on the table as we ate breakfast. In addition, the *Things of Beauty Growing* exhibition at the Fitzwilliam Museum included work by Hanssen Pigott. I also had an opportunity to examine some of her earlier work (which was not wood-fired) in great detail, when I was involved in documenting the Ann Carr ceramics collection for Aberystwyth University Ceramics Archive in 2014. From this experience I developed an understanding of and appreciation for Hanssen Pigott's abilities as a thrower, which in turn informed my capacity for relating to the individual vessels in her later still life assemblages.

**Visits to studios**

The visits to Bourges to interview François Lerat were particularly enlightening. The first visit in October 2014 was five years after Jacqueline's death when her home and studio were mostly unchanged. It was possible to see some of her sculptures in the setting where they had been made, and the manner in which Jacqueline had arranged them with natural objects, both in her home and studio. Her garden, which was such a powerful source of inspiration for her work was then also much as she had left it.

On this visit and two subsequent occasions I had opportunities to visit the Lerats' former studio in La Borne, which they had vacated in 1955, and at the time of my first visit (2014) remained intact, exactly as it had been when they had left it. The kiln there, which was built in 1943, was still in perfect condition, although it had not been fired in the intervening six decades. Having the opportunities to examine both this kiln, and the one built in Bourges in 1955, contributed to my understanding of the technical aspects of the firing process that the Lerats practiced.

The visit I made to Hanssen Pigott in Queensland in May 2013 allowed me to see her home and studio, an opportunity that aided my understanding of her aesthetic choices and preferences through her collection of artworks and arrangement of household furnishings and objects. I also gained an insight into her working processes at this time, having assisted with the preparation of a number of glaze tests for inclusion in the firing, preparation of the

kiln for firing, and in the early stages of the firing itself. I had visited Hanssen Pigott's previous studio in Netherdale in Queensland in 1997, at which time I examined her kiln there in detail, whilst carrying out research for *Wood-fired Ceramics*.

### Attendance at and participation in international woodfire conferences and other specialist woodfire events

Attendance at, and participation in specialist international woodfire conferences over the past thirty years has provided me with a unique overview of woodfiring and wood-fired ceramics from historical, traditional and contemporary perspectives. Additionally, my experience of these events has given me an insight into the breadth of contemporary woodfire methodologies and associated aesthetics, allowing an overview of the prevalence of the type of work that is the focus of this study.

### *The Log Book*

My involvement with *The Log Book*, as co-founder, editor and publisher over the past nineteen years has likewise granted me a unique perspective and knowledge of all aspects of woodfire practice and wood-fired ceramics. Articles have been published by and about two of the case studies, as well as on subjects of relevance to the practices of all three, and the aesthetics associated with the type of work they produced.

### Feminist Theory

Despite the fact that the three makers in this study are women, I have chosen not to specifically engage in feminist theory as a methodology. The rationale for this decision is that evidence did not emerge from the research to suggest that feminism was an important consideration in their work.

In recent years there has been a significant increase in scholarship on women in the arts, crafts, and design in the inter-war and post World War II periods, focussing on individuals as well as disciplines, incorporating literature and specialist exhibitions. The makers whose work I have chosen to focus on in this study are three twentieth-century women artists, all of whom had high-temperature woodfire practices. Historically the high temperature woodfiring of ceramics was an area in which only men were employed or occupied. In the pottery industry that developed as a result of the industrial revolution and in traditional potteries, women carried out a range of tasks but were not generally, as far as is known,

involved in firing. When independent studio potters emerged, the ethos included being involved in as many aspects of the process as possible, from sourcing and preparing materials for clays and glazes, to making, decorating and firing. This was a direct response to the system of division of labour that had evolved in the pottery industry, where the role of workers as machine operators was seen as being dehumanising and unfulfilling. For many studio potters, both male and female, inspired by historical antecedents, woodfiring was considered the most appropriate means of firing their work.

The three makers who are the subjects of this study all became studio potters and artists between the 1920s and 1950s, at a time when such a career choice was still relatively unusual – particularly for women. In the context of the crafts in the USA, Jenni Sorkin has referred to the generation of mid-century craftswomen as 'protofeminist – who would not have called themselves feminist – who were really changing the landscape socially through the means that they had available to them'.[10]

In 2015 the exhibition *Pathmakers: Women in Art, Craft and Design, Midcentury and Today*, which considered the important contributions of women to Modernism in post-war visual culture was shown at the Museum of Art and Design (New York).[11] When asked whether any of the artists included in the exhibition had helped to lay the groundwork for the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s, co-curator Jennifer Scanlon responded that they had not done so directly, and elaborated by stating that the members of the feminist movement in the period referred to (1960s and 1970s) did not focus on the advances of the generation that had preceded them, but instead concentrated on 'the centuries of women who had been held back. They rejected the general narrative of Modernism, which privileged men and their achievements, and in so doing they tended to ignore the women who had actually been successful within that narrative'.[12] Scanlan added that in her view this situation has slowly been changing with subsequent generations of scholarship.

10. Jenni Sorkin, 'The Invisible Hands', interview by Joyce Lovelace, *American Craft*, Vol. 76, No. 05 (Oct./Nov.) 2016, p.88.
11. Web site of the Museum of Art and Design, http://madmuseum.org/exhibition/pathmakers Accessed December 2016.
12. Jennifer Scanlan, interviewed for the American Crafts Council. Accessed 28th June 2017. https://craftcouncil.org/post/pathmakers-exhibition-pays-tribute-pioneering-women-craft-and-design

As Scanlan outlined with reference to the women whose work was showcased in *Pathfinders*, there is more than one way to instigate social change besides protest 'Another way is to move quietly', she argued, to 'make small steps towards change, shifts that perhaps don't attract attention at the time, but incrementally have an effect'.[13] The period during which Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie began her career and was actively woodfiring was decades before the 1960s. Both Jacqueline Lerat and Gwyn Hanssen Pigott were already involved in pottery and advancing their careers by the 1960s. It could be stated that all three makers in this study contributed to changing the perception of what it was to be a professional craftswoman or artist working in clay. They did so by example, and through their lives and careers showed that it was possible for women to succeed in the field of ceramics.

There is of necessity much technical information in this thesis on kilns, clays, glazes, and processes used, as these are central to the methodologies of the three artists and potters. Woodfiring as a process is without parallel in the realm of possible fuels for firing ceramics, in that it has a direct impact on the work fired. The work produced by the makers in this study evolved as a direct result of choices of materials and processes and consequently these aspects of their practices are analysed.

From the informed perspective of a maker and woodfirer, it has been possible for me to understand the combinations of materials and processes used that resulted in the finished work, in a manner and to an extent that would not have been possible had I come to this research from a different research background. I have significant experience of the type of kiln used by Hanssen Pigott, which is similar to that used by Jacqueline Lerat, having conducted 100 firings over fifteen years between 1985 and 2000 in the Bourry-box kiln that my husband Robert Sanderson and I designed and built at our studio in Scotland.

### 1.5: Thesis structure

**Chapter 2** opens with an explanation of the process of high-temperature woodfiring and discusses some of the factors that differentiate woodfiring from other firing methods. Some reasons for choosing to woodfire are addressed – an overview in the context of the twentieth century and continuing today. There is an overview of the development of high-

13. Ibid.

temperature woodfiring as a technique used by studio potters in the West in the twentieth century, and the emergence of a range of woodfire methodologies and associated aesthetics is explored. The subtle wood-fired ceramics and associated aesthetics that are the focus of this thesis are analysed, and comparison made with other genres of wood-fired ceramics and associated aesthetics. The potential of specific types of woodfire surfaces to contribute to quietness of mood in ceramic work is discussed. The aesthetics of imperfection and the elements of uncertainty and risk that are inherent in woodfiring are considered. Defining woodfiring and wood-fired ceramics as a specialist area within the field of ceramics by process, and the question of whether the aesthetics of wood-fired ceramics are process driven are examined. Lastly, woodfiring and wood-fired ceramics are considered in some broader contexts.

**Chapters 3, 4 and 5** consider the very different trajectories of the lives, careers and work of the three makers. The following constitutes a generic chapter outline. Further headings are utilised in individual chapters, as appropriate. Each chapter begins with an overview and introduction followed by a biographical narrative, providing context for the work. The formative aesthetic influences and historical precedents that contributed to the development of their work are discussed, followed by an account of the evolution of their work within the relevant periods. There follows a discussion of how the subtle woodfire aesthetic of the work exemplifies 'The Quiet Touch of the Flame'. Their work is then compared to that of their contemporaries. Lastly their influences and legacies are discussed.

**Chapter 6:** Summary and conclusion

### 1.6: Terminology

Over the course of the twentieth century many terms were used to describe individuals involved in producing work made from clay, by both commentators and practitioners themselves. These have included art potter, artist potter, studio potter, potter, ceramist, ceramicist, ceramic artist, ceramic sculptor, artist, and maker. In my view this is a personal matter for each individual to describe their occupation as they choose. Throughout this thesis the descriptive words 'potter' and 'artist' are those used most frequently with reference to those who produced the work discussed. I consider that these terms are interchangeable in this context, and have based their use on the terms applied by the individuals involved. The more general term 'maker' is also used.

In the context of this study Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie in reference to her work always used the term pottery, and would appear to have considered herself a potter. She made 'pots' and referred to 'potters', even though the pottery that she produced during the period, was, in common with the work of some of her contemporaries in the interwar period, discussed in the same terms and was considered by the art critics of the day as being on a par with contemporary sculpture and painting. The contemporary 'potter' whose work she most admired was William Staite Murray, who considered himself an artist and aligned himself with artists rather than potters.

In contrast to Pleydell-Bouverie, Jacqueline Lerat considered herself an artist and described herself as such from the earliest days of her career. Working in France, there was not perhaps as much emphasis on distinctions between the uses of the terms 'potter' and 'artist', as may have been the case in some English speaking countries. While earlier in her career Lerat made clearly functional pots, she later concentrated on producing figurative sculpture and subsequently abstract forms.

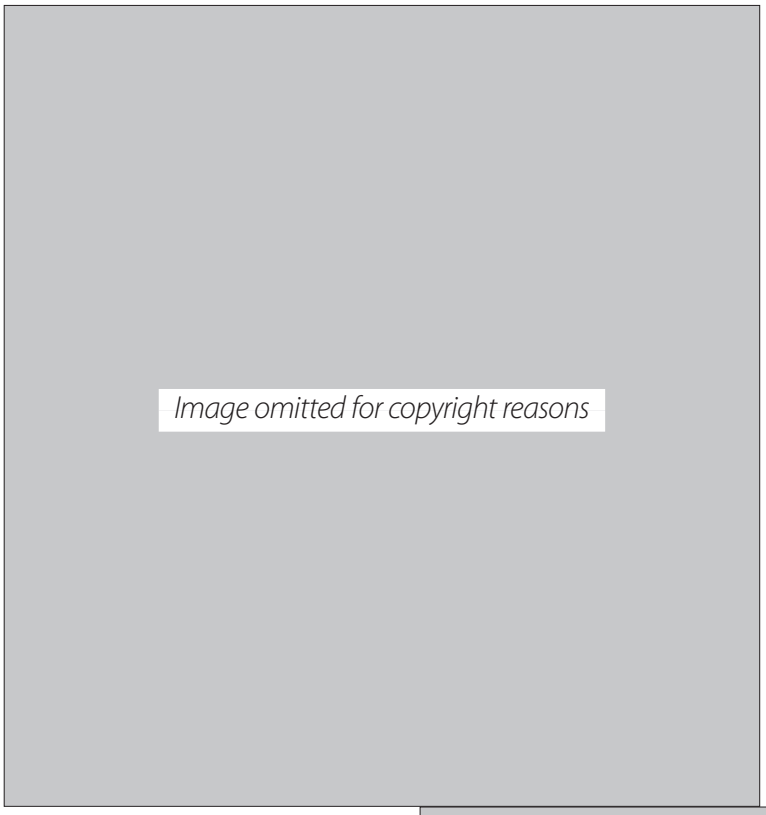
Gwyn Hanssen Pigott invariably referred to her work as pots/pottery and described herself as a potter throughout her career, including in the last interview that she gave just days prior to her death, even during its latter stages when she specialised in producing still life assemblages, which were shown exclusively in art gallery and museum settings.

In this thesis I have used the terms 'pots', 'pottery' 'ceramics' and 'sculptural forms', again reflecting the preferences of the individuals whose work is the subject of discussion, as well as that of the other makers who are referenced. This thesis does not therefore, involve itself in any debate that may exist on the subject of an actual or perceived 'art' versus 'craft' divide.

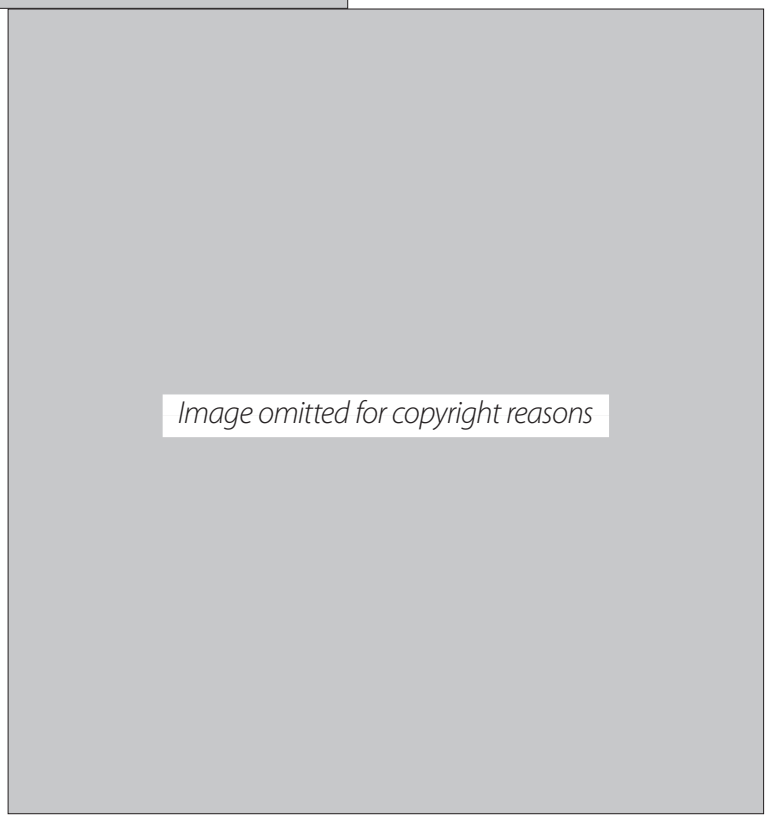
As to the places where potters/artists work – some refer to them as studios, others as workshops. The French *atelier* can be translated as either studio or workshop. The term workshop has generally been used, except in instances where the individual under discussion specifically refers to their work location as their studio.

## Chapter 2

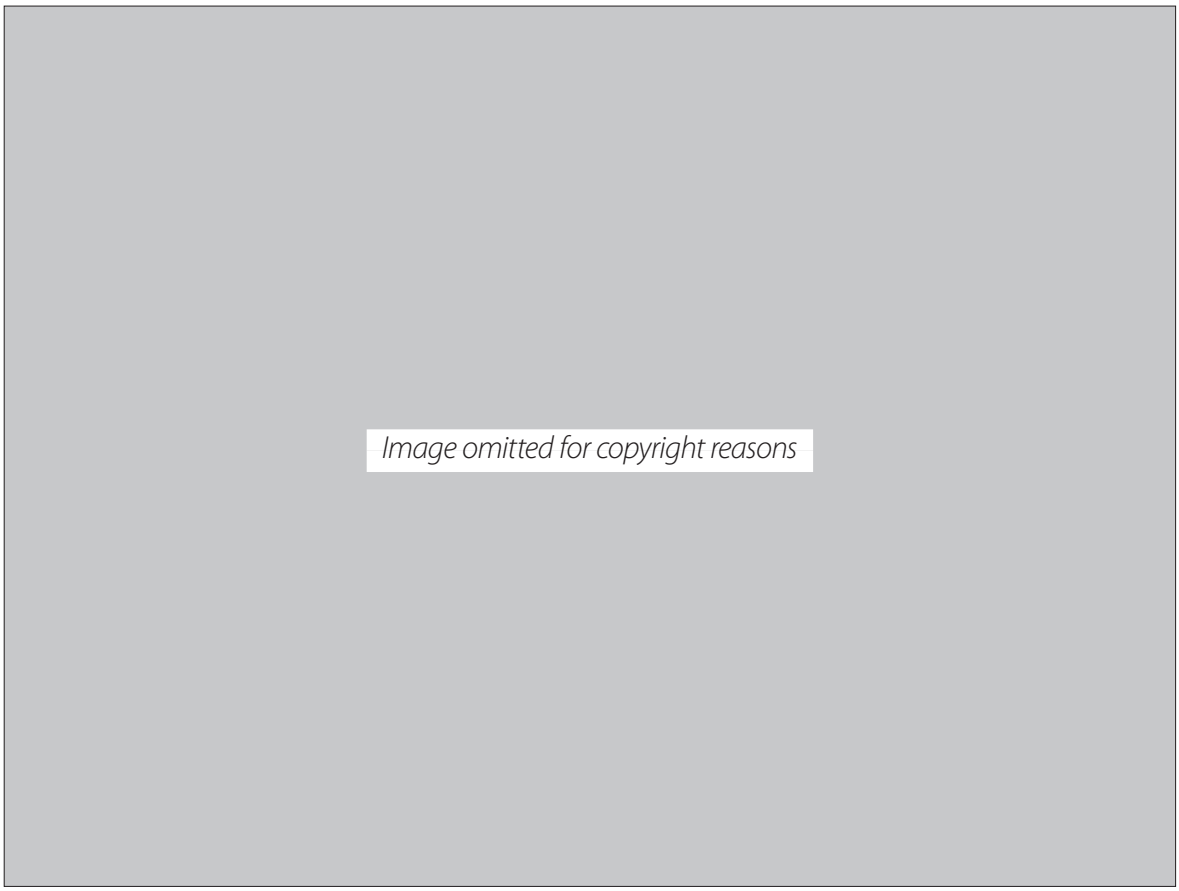
# An Introduction to Woodfiring and Wood-fired Ceramics



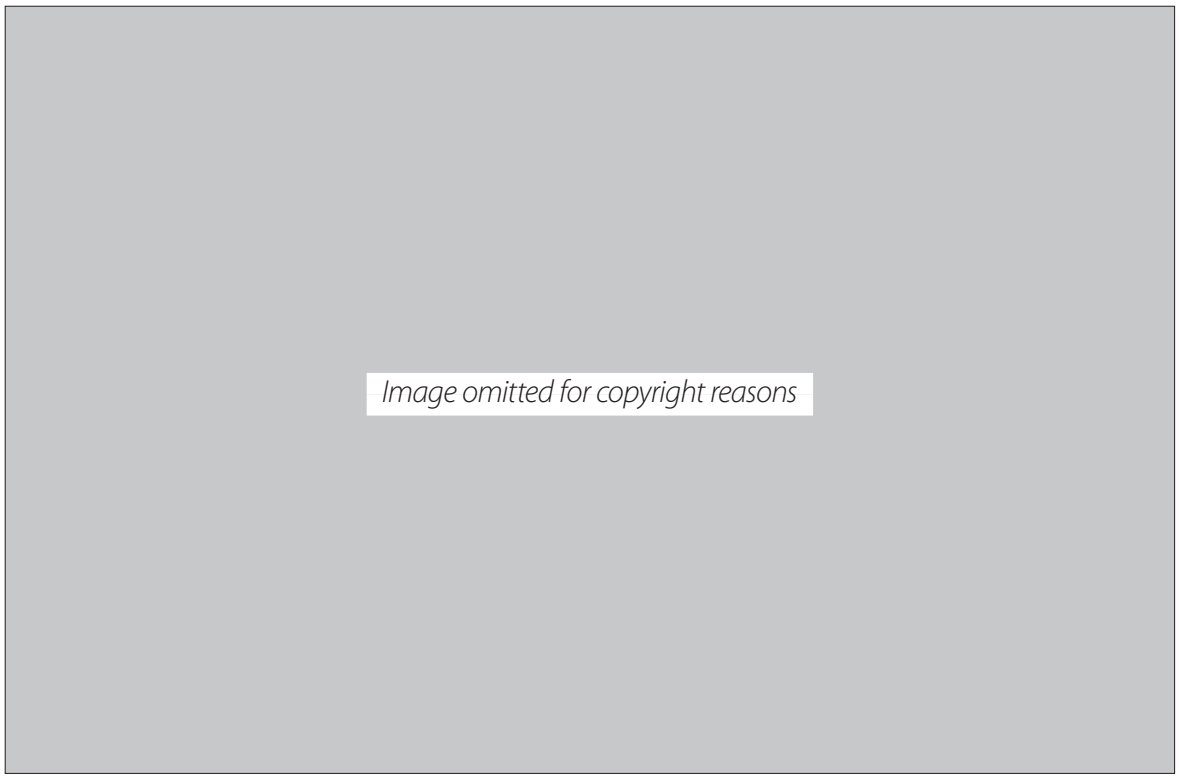

**1.** *Saloir* (Storage Jar), La Borne, Cher, France, 19th century. Traditional, maker unknown. (Image source: Musée de la Poterie, La Borne. Photograph: Coll Minogue, 1990.)



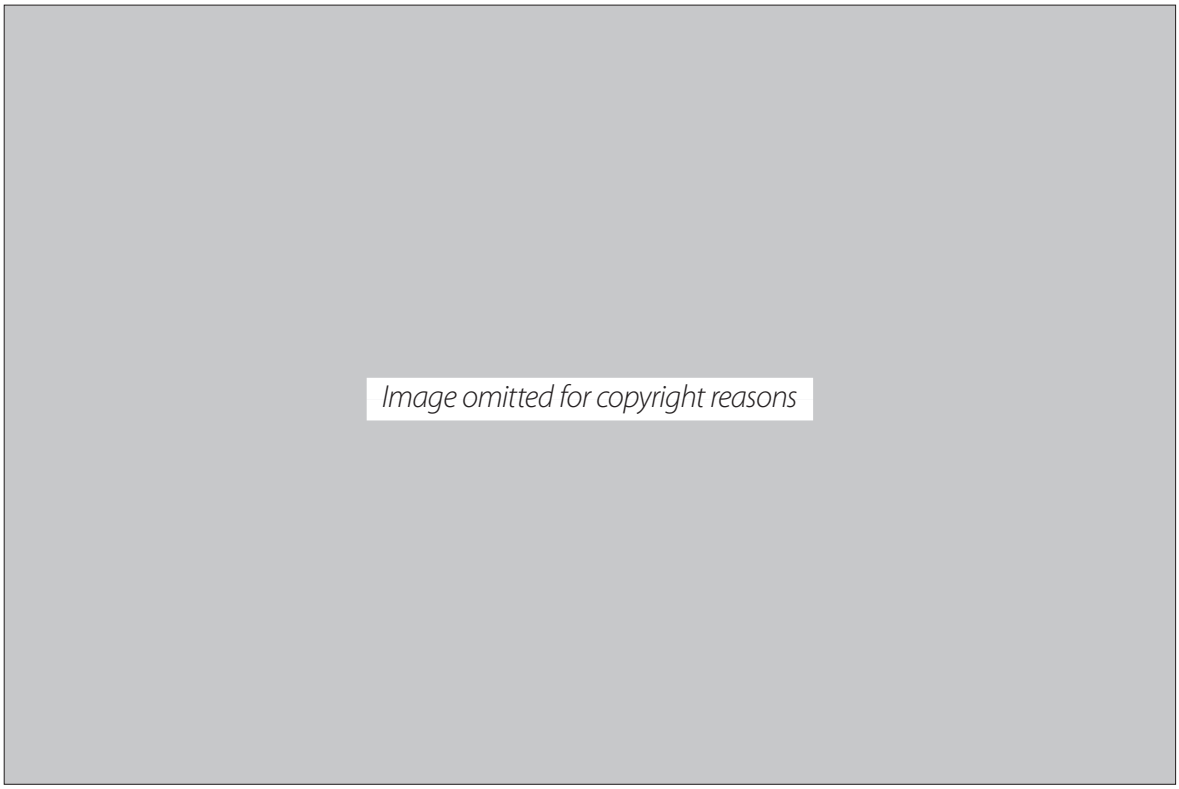

**2.** *Funnel-necked Drinking Vessel*, Siegburg, Germany, c.1500 CE. Stoneware, natural ash glaze. Maker unknown. (Image source: Victoria and Albert Museum, London.)



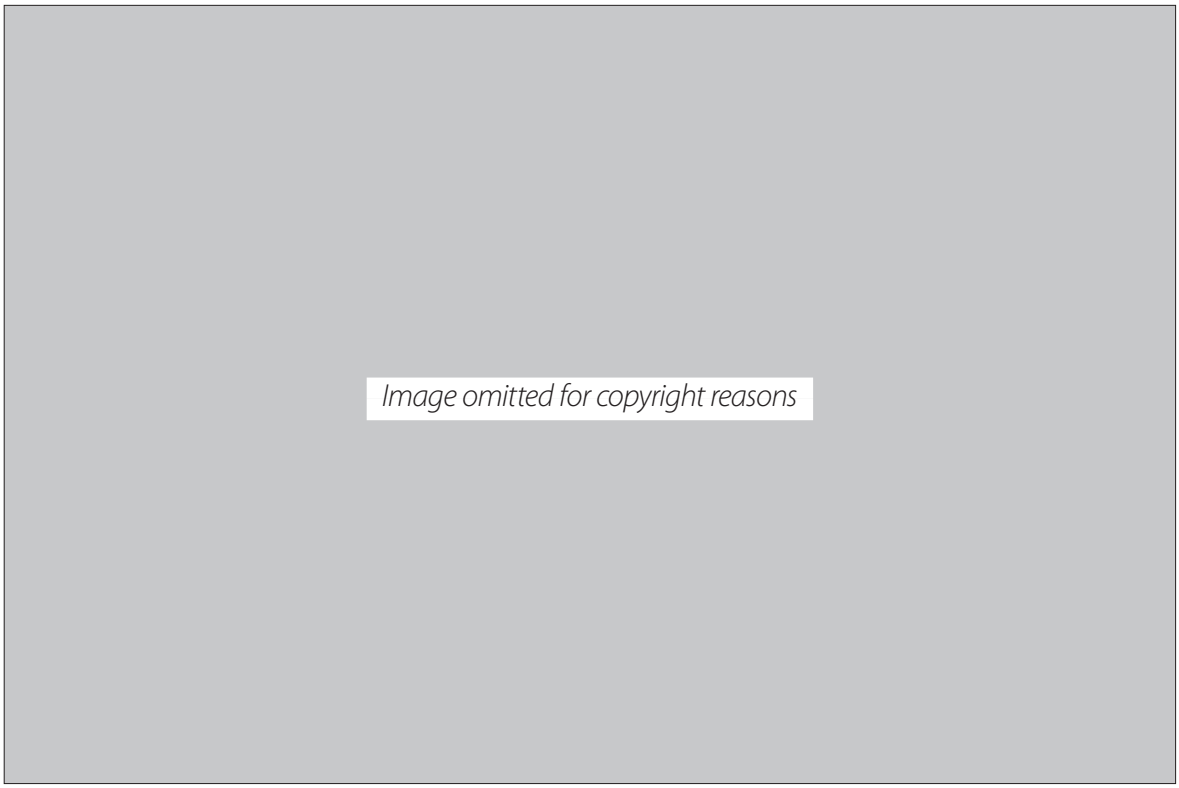

**3.** The climbing kiln at the Leach Pottery, St Ives, Cornwall, UK (Image source: *The Log Book* Archive).



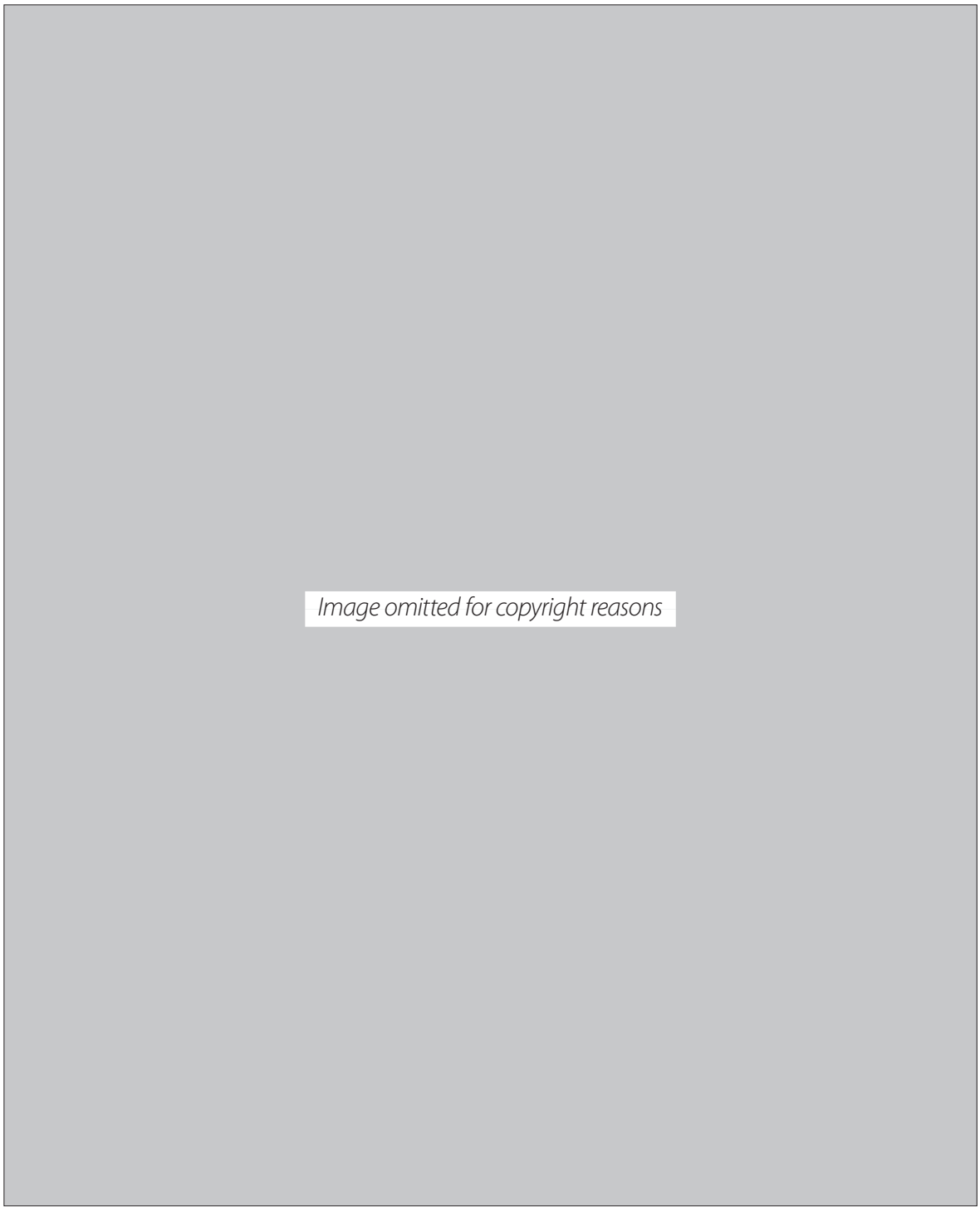

**4.** The round-chambered, down-draught, Bourry-box type kiln built at Michael Cardew's pottery, Wenford Bridge, Cornwall, UK, in 1949. The original up-draught kiln constructed in 1939 was based on the bottle kiln at Cardew's previous pottery in Winchcombe, Gloucestershire. Intended for firing earthenware, this now became a second chamber to the new addition, which was designed for firing to stoneware temperatures (Image source: Minogue and Sanderson Wood-fired Ceramics Archive.).



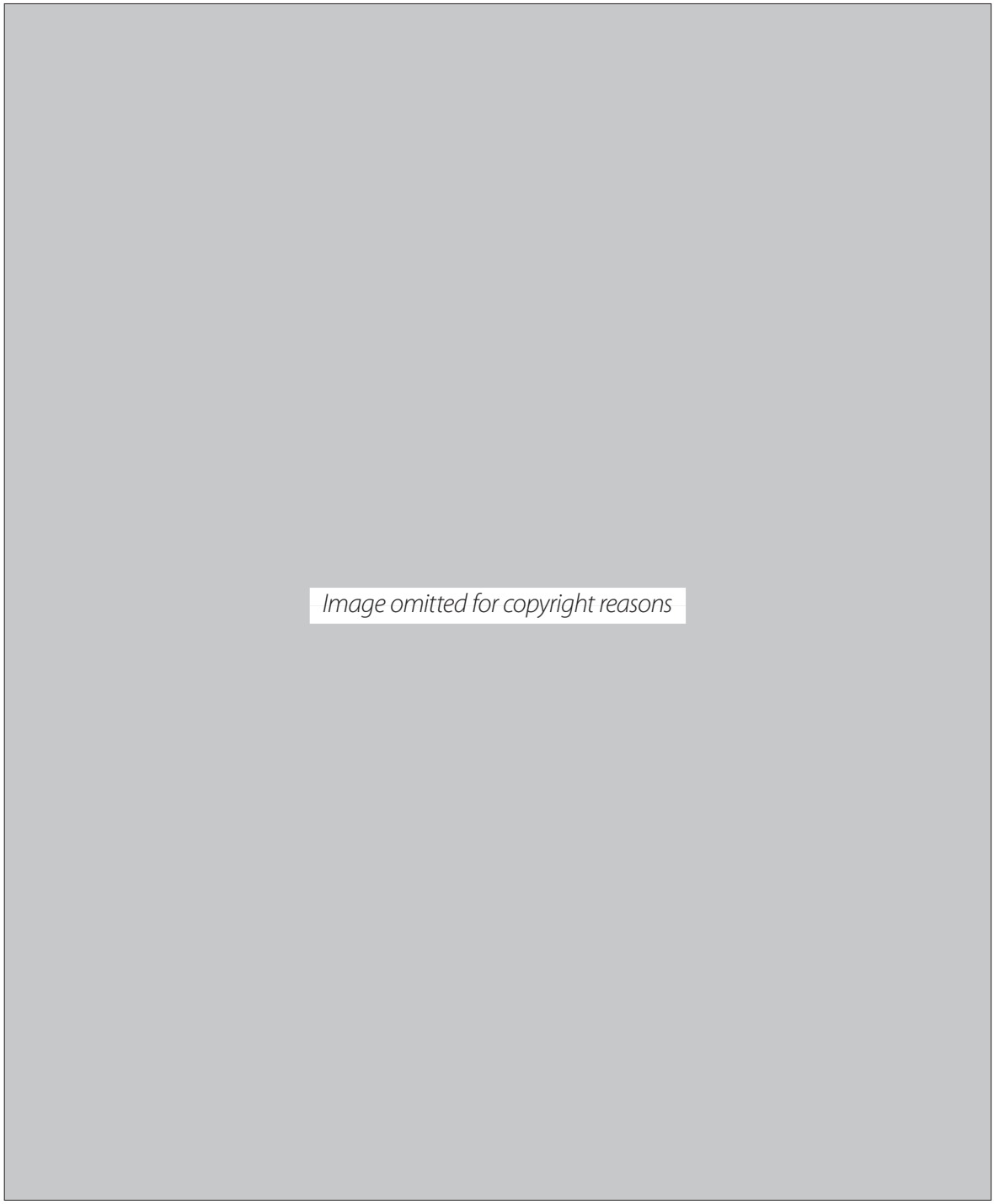

**5.** Ueda Naokata V's anagama, Shigaraki, Japan. This kiln incorporates a side entrance at right, to allow access to the rear of the chamber for packing and unpacking. (Photograph: Robert Sanderson, 1997.)



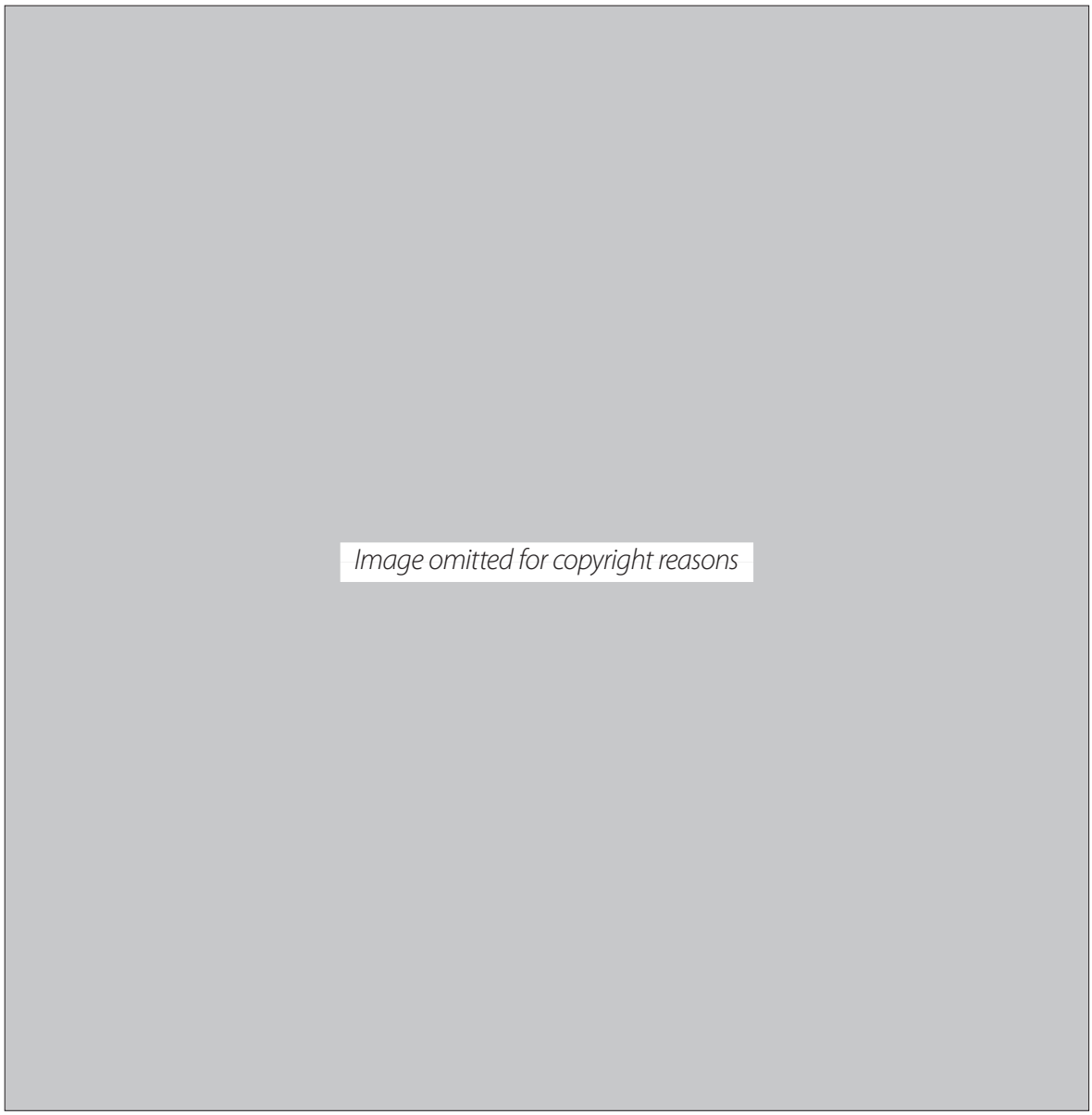

**6.** Replica of a noborigama (climbing kiln) from the Edo period (1615–1868) in the grounds of Aichi Prefectural Ceramics Museum, Japan. (Photograph: Robert Sanderson, 1997.)




**7.** Water Jar known as Yabure-bukuro ('Burst bag' or 'Torn pouch') Iga, Japan, late sixteenth century, 20cm in height. Unknown potter. (Image source: The Art of Japanese Ceramics, by Tsugio Mikami, Weatherhill, 1972.)




**8.** Untitled Stack, by Peter Voulkos, 1981, wood-fired stoneware, 104cm in height.
(Image source: Studio Potter, Vol 11, No.1, 1982.)




**9.** *Collection of jars*, La Borne, nineteenth century. Traditional, makers unknown. (Image source: Musée de la Poterie, La Borne, Cher, France.)

## Chapter 2 – An Introduction to Woodfiring and Wood-fired Ceramics

### Chapter overview

This thesis is concerned with quiet or subtle aesthetics of wood-fired ceramics focussing on the work of three individual potters and artists which exemplifies these aesthetics. It is appropriate therefore to examine the subjects of woodfiring and wood-fired ceramics from a range of perspectives as an aid to understanding how such qualities are achieved and the contexts in which they are produced. How distinctive woodfire characteristics can contribute an overall feeling of quietness in ceramic work is also considered.

### 2.1: An explanation of the process of high-temperature woodfiring and discussion of some factors that differentiate woodfiring from other firing methods

At its most basic, the process of woodfiring can be defined as the firing of pottery using wood as fuel to generate the heat necessary for the metamorphic reaction that transforms raw unfired clay into fired ceramics. Loosely applied the term wood-fired relates to all ceramics that have been fired using wood as fuel, and includes pottery from the earliest times. It is considered likely that wood has been used as a fuel since objects made of clay were first hardened and transformed by fire some 26,000 years ago, marking the beginning of ceramic technology.[1] The use of wood as a fuel for firing pottery has continued uninterrupted to the present time in some areas of the world, including in many developing countries, since it is the most readily available source of fuel and has a long tradition.

Following the industrial revolution in the West, coal became the primary fuel used for firing kilns in large-scale pottery production in many countries, including Britain, where the use of coal was introduced in the Staffordshire potteries in the 17th century.[2] Oil, gas and electricity gradually replaced coal and wood as the most common fuels used in the pottery industry. Exceptions included the Sèvres National Manufactory in France where the firing of porcelain to 1400°C in huge woodfire kilns continued up until the 1960s.[3]

1. Pamela Vandiver et al, 'The Origins of Ceramic Technology at Dolni Vestonice, Czechoslovakia', *Science*, Vol. 246, November 1989, p.1002.
2. Aileen Dawson, 'The Growth of the Staffordshire Ceramic Industry', in Ian Freestone and David Gaimster, editors, *Pottery in the Making World Ceramic Traditions,* The British Museum Press, 1997, p.205.
3. The remaining kilns are still fired occasionally to keep the technique alive. Robert Sanderson, 'Firing a four de Sèvres, *The Log Book*, issue 52, 2012, pp.22–25.

Wood was still widely used as a fuel for firing in some traditional, mainly country potteries in the West into the twentieth century, but these potteries had declined dramatically in number by mid-century, due to changing requirements for vessels for use both in the home and in industry, as well as increasing competition from low priced pottery manufactured in factories. Concurrent with the phasing out of wood as fuel in industry and the decline of small traditional rural potteries, resurgence in its use in the high-temperature firing of ceramics occurred in the emerging field of studio pottery. Woodfiring with the purpose of achieving a range of aesthetic outcomes developed throughout the twentieth century and continues to be widely practiced today.

In contemporary terms wood-fired is most often interpreted as meaning pottery/ceramics fired in kilns specifically constructed for this purpose, where wood is the fuel used. In general other descriptions are used for pottery fired without the use of a kiln structure, even when wood is used for firing. These include bon-fired and pit-fired, which are self-explanatory terms. The definition of what constitutes a kiln can itself be open to interpretation, but in general terms a pottery kiln is taken to mean an enclosed permanent, or semi-permanent structure built from refractory firebricks or clay or a combination of both, in which pottery is stacked for firing.

In the context of the high-temperature firing of pottery, what makes wood different from other fuels is that as it burns, it has an impact on clay that goes beyond the generation of heat. During firing, a light flyash – a by-product of combustion consisting predominantly of potassium oxide – is carried by the natural draught of the kiln, caused by the draw of the chimney and deposited on the work stacked in the chamber or chambers. There it combines with silica and alumina in the clay to form a layer of glaze at temperatures above 1280/1300°C, resulting in a non-uniform coating of natural ash glaze on clay surfaces directly exposed to the flame.[4] Generally the longer the firing process the greater the build-up of ash. Long duration firings, lasting for up to several days are often carried out in single chamber kilns based on Oriental models or anagama in Japanese (see Figure 5, page 47).

4. For a detailed description of the chemical processes involved in woodfiring see 'The Chemistry of Woodfiring', by Wolf Matthes, *The Log Book*, issue 30, 2007, pp. 3–8.

Depending on the duration of the firing and the composition of the clay bodies used a range of colours and tones can be achieved. The development of colour on wood-fired work is determined by factors including the level of volatilised salts from the wood, the amount of iron oxide contained in the wood and the clay body, and whether the kiln is fired in a mostly reducing or oxidising atmosphere. Reduction occurs when the fuel used to fire a kiln has insufficient oxygen to burn properly. It affects both the clay body and particularly the oxides used to colour glazes. Potters use phases of reduction in firing to enhance both clay and glaze effects.

In wood-fired glazed ware, the glazed surfaces obtained can be far richer and more varied than when the same glazes are fired in electric, gas or oil-fired kilns. The texture of the clay surface is also affected during woodfiring, and in some instances forms themselves can be distorted, either subtly or to an extreme, depending on variables that include the duration of firing, temperature, method of stacking and location in the kiln.

The type of wadding used in stacking work in the kiln for firing is another of the variables in woodfiring. Wadding is a high alumina compound that will not flux at high temperature, and consequently will not permanently adhere to the work. Its purpose is to prevent work from becoming stuck to kiln furniture or to other pots with molten ash. Depending on their placement and the materials from which they are made, wad markings can be used creatively to enhance the finished work as part of an overall aesthetic.[5] Seashells are frequently used in the placing of work in high-temperature woodfire kilns, and can have an impact on the surfaces of work by leaving a halo-type effect.

In woodfire kilns – even relatively small-scale ones – a range of effects can be achieved in different parts of the kiln, due to variations in temperature and localised atmosphere, the design of the kiln, and the wood variety used for firing. Weather conditions can also have an impact on the firing and on the finished fired results.[6] In a multi-chambered kiln, or noborigama in Japanese (see Figure 6, page 47), entirely different results can be achieved in successive interconnected chambers. That such variables can be achieved in a single firing

5. Owen Rye, 'Wads', *The Log Book*, issue 2, 2000, pp. 3–7; Ben Brierley, 'Active Wadding', *The Log Book*, issue 28, 2006, pp. 15–19.
6. Bernard Leach discusses the impact of weather conditions on firing in *A Potter's Book*, 1973 Faber & Faber edition, p.194.

encourages exploration of possibilities such as making work using a range of different clays, from smooth, fine-grained bodies to coarser more open-textured clays for placement in particular firing zones. This is another factor that challenges and encourages experimentation, to produce work that is appropriate for, and will benefit from being placed in these distinct areas.

An intriguing aspect of woodfiring is the way in which the passage of the flame through the kiln chamber or chambers is documented on the surface of the work, leaving a permanent visual record of the firing. With experience it is possible to read the path of the flame on the work. Historical wood-fired work can similarly be read.

Another aspect of woodfiring that singles it out as different from other methods of firing is the time factor involved. From the moment of placing work in the kiln it can be as long as two weeks before it is possible to unpack it, depending on the size of the kiln (i.e. the thermal mass that has to be heated and cooled), and the duration of the firing. Even with relatively small kilns that have short firing cycles of no longer than twenty-four hours, the process from packing to unpacking generally takes four to five days.

It is not possible to buy a readymade woodfire kiln; each one is hand built and consequently is never exactly like any other. Woodfire kilns are frequently built by potters with the assistance of colleagues, or by semi-professional kiln builders who are invariably woodfire potters themselves. Unlike other types of kilns commonly in use in ceramics studios, such as industrially manufactured electric and gas-fired kilns, woodfire kilns can be aesthetically pleasing sculptural or architectural forms in their own right.[7]

Since the early 1980s woodfiring has been the subject of many large-scale national and international symposia and conferences, several of which were primarily discussion and lecture-based (see Appendix II for a list of some national and international woodfire conferences that took place between 1983 and 2018). In addition, numerous other specialist participatory events, often including the firing of one or more kilns have taken

7. Two potters who have addressed this aspect of woodfire kilns are Randy Johnston (USA), and Svend Bayer (UK). Randy Johnston, 'Between Two Fires', *American Woodfire '91*, catalogue of the exhibition, at the University of Iowa Museum of Art (Oct 1991 to March 1992), p.17. Svend Bayer quoted in Minogue and Sanderson, 2000, p.95.

place worldwide. Several of these have been held in the traditional woodfire village of La Borne in central France.[8] Many of the same people attend these specialist woodfire events worldwide and there tends to be a feeling of camaraderie and community, as well as a freedom and generosity in the sharing of knowledge amongst woodfirers.

These and other events have contributed to the furtherance of what is now regarded by some commentators as 'the woodfire movement'. Unlike other areas in ceramics, for the past nineteen years there has been a dedicated quarterly print publication for woodfiring. In his book *The Art of Woodfire A Contemporary Ceramics Practice* (2011), Owen Rye asserts that:

> The main contributor to woodfire literature now is the small almost cultish publication, *The Log Book*. The content is devoted entirely to woodfiring. Owners and editors Coll Minogue and Robert Sanderson live in Ireland but travel widely to international meetings and events, and contributions to the magazine are international in scope. […] this magazine contains a wide range of articles, all aimed at distributing knowledge among the cognoscenti. It has contributed significantly to the feeling of belonging to an international movement.[9]

## 2.2: Some reasons for choosing to woodfire – from the twentieth century to the present day

> In the past, necessity was the basis for woodfiring, whereas today another necessity – that of personal choices related to aesthetic decision-making – usually prevails.[10]

Thus wrote American woodfirer, author, and educator Jack Troy who reflects on changes in attitude toward and reasons for woodfiring in modern times. There has probably never before been such a wide range of information on woodfiring so readily available. This has made the choices of processes and possible aesthetic directions all the more difficult for the woodfirers of today. Some of the possible reasons for opting to woodfire discussed here may be more relevant in the context of woodfiring in the mid to latter parts of the twentieth century, than when two of the three potters who are the focus of this study began their woodfire practices. Others were as relevant then as now.

8. One of the best known of these was 'La Borne en Feu' in July 1990, during which 25 woodfire kilns, including the large community owned traditional kiln, were fired simultaneously, affording visitors the opportunity to travel from kiln to kiln to observe the firings and finished work, and in some instances participate in firings. See Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, 'La Borne en Feu – Impressions of a French Wood Fire Conference', *Ceramics Art and Perception,* issue 3, 1991, pp.13–18, for a report on this event.
9. Owen Rye, *The Art of Woodfire – A Contemporary Ceramics Practice*, Mansfield Press, 2011, p.22–23.
10. Jack Troy, *Wood-fired Stoneware and Porcelain*, Chilton, 1995, p.13.

## Aesthetic reasons

Aesthetic preferences are probably the single most important reason why potters and artists choose to woodfire. The attraction of woodfiring is primarily about the results achievable that cannot be obtained through any other means, and the qualities that these are perceived to contribute to an individual's work. Depending on many variables – type of kiln, clays used, length of firing, type of wood used, how and where the work is stacked in the kiln – an infinite range of results can be achieved. Once choices have been made concerning materials and processes, a potter often continues to work within this range. Any changes to their practice are usually made on a slow and incremental basis as research develops over many years.

Aesthetic choices governing woodfiring extend beyond the possible range of effects achievable on raw clay surfaces, as woodfiring also impacts on glazed surfaces to a greater or lesser extent depending primarily on the design of kiln used. Since the beginning of the studio pottery movement, many potters have been motivated to woodfire as a result of their attraction to classical oriental glazes, particularly Chinese and Japanese, and the conviction that similar effects can only be achieved by firing their work in woodfire kilns. Although many of the glazes they so admire were fired in saggars, these potters believe that the quality of reduction responsible for the glaze characteristics can only be achieved by firing with wood.[11]

Woodfiring can contribute characteristics to finished fired work that go beyond surface colours and textures. The form of pieces can also be altered to varying extents during firing. Though this is an aspect of the process over which the potter has little control, it is another consideration in the overall aesthetic outcome when firing with wood.

## The concept of head, heart, and hand

In his book, *A Potter's Challenge* published in 1975, Leach stated that 'we are searching for a balanced form of self expression and pottery is one of the few activities today in which a person can use his natural faculties of heart, head and hand in balance'.[12] This concept is one that has attracted many to the lifestyle of the potter. The level of total involvement that

11. Coll Minogue, 'Wood-fired Ceramics – Contemporary Interpretations', *NCECA Journal 2001*, p.106.
12. Bernard Leach, *A Potter's Challenge*, Souvenir Press, 1975, p.17.

is both possible and necessary in woodfiring is an important attraction for many practitioners. It is seen as something worthwhile, satisfying, and challenging. It engages mental, creative, emotional, and physical aspects of the person.

American potter, author, and educator Daniel Rhodes (1911–1989), whose books on pottery played an important role in the dissemination of information for potters in the 1950s, '60s and '70s, wrote:

> The wood[fire] kiln must be tended; watched closely throughout the firing process, and stoked at just the right pace. The advance of temperature can only be achieved by careful and knowledgeable management of the fire. Thus the potter feels that he is truly firing his pieces, rather than consigning them to a piece of equipment for treatment. In firing with wood, the ceramist gains an identity with the transmutations brought about through the fire, and he feels the advance of heat as a personal accomplishment. To build and fire a wood burning kiln is one of the best ways to learn about kiln design, construction and firing.[13]

Woodfirers experience the satisfaction that comes from being actively and creatively involved in the process of firing, and thus influencing the outcome, but only to a certain extent. This involvement results in an identification with the work, which is quite unlike that of firing with any other fuel.

**Fire**

Perhaps a less easily definable attraction to the process of woodfiring has to do with humankind's relationship to fire throughout history. References to the possible 'origin of fire' in different mythologies represent a wide range of ideologies. The controlled use of fire is recognised as 'a critically important innovation in human evolution'.[14] Benefits and activities that have been associated with fire include heat, light, protection, comfort, and a means of cooking. But fire can also destroy, and this combination of characteristics, beneficial, powerful and frightening led to its worship.[15]

In contemporary lifestyles, in modern homes in industrialised countries there is now generally a total disconnection from fire as a means of cooking food, or as the main source

13. Daniel Rhodes, *Kilns – Design, Construction and Operation*, Chilton, Radnor, Pennsylvania (second edition), 1981, p.96.
14. Steven Mithen, 'Fire', in *The Seventy Great Inventions of the Ancient World*, Thames & Hudson, 2004, p.24.
15. Hazel Rossetti, *Fire: Technology, Symbolism, Ecology, Science, Hazard*, Oxford University Press, 1993, p.3.

of heat and light. An open hearth has long ceased to be the central focus of the home, producer of both heat and cooked food. However, a fascination with fire itself persists. A definite pleasure is to be experienced sitting around a fire in the company of friends, or sitting alone staring into a fire – musing and lost in thought. It is easy to lose oneself in quiet contemplation or reverie when gazing into the brightness of flickering flames. In *The Psychoanalysis of Fire* Gaston Bachelard wrote of 'this hypnotized form of observation' and continued, 'this slightly hypnotised condition that is surprisingly constant in all fire watchers, is highly conducive to psychoanalytical investigation.'[16]

While the purpose of firing with wood is to achieve the firing of the work in the kiln, and an attempt to satisfy a personal quest for a specific aesthetic, woodfiring also affords the opportunity to work with fire, a fundamental and elemental experience, using it as a creative tool. This aspect of the process is undoubtedly an attraction for many woodfirers, whether articulated or not.

**Aspirational reasons – a connection to historical and contemporary precedents**

Some woodfirers are attracted by the fact that many of the great pots from throughout history were wood-fired. Inherent in the process is a sense of continuity and connection to the past, deriving from the knowledge that this method of firing is as old as the history of ceramics itself.

Many aspiring woodfirers have travelled to those areas of the world where woodfiring was still being practiced – including Japan, Korea, Thailand and France – to gain first-hand experience not only of the techniques involved, but to study in close proximity the work that had originally inspired them. The pottery traditions of the South East United States – the salt-glazed and alkaline glazed ware produced in North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia, also attracted studio potters. Some potters chose to remain in these countries and regions to establish their own workshops with woodfire kilns.

Aspirational reasons for woodfiring can also be extended to contemporary practices and a desire to pursue what is perceived as a particular creative path and lifestyle involving

16. Gaston Bachelard, *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, translated by Alan C.M. Ross, Beacon Press, 1964, p.3.

woodfiring and wood-fired pottery/ceramics. The French ceramic artist Claude Champy (b.1942) has described the impact that visiting La Borne as a young art student in 1965 had on him:

> That was the first time I saw it all! In the space of two or three days I had met Yves Mohy, Elizabeth Joulia, Anne Kjærsgaard, Jean Linard […] caught a glimpse of Ivanoff and been introduced to the Lerats in Bourges. It was unbelievable. I had never set foot in a pottery studio but on my return I knew I wanted to be part of that world. I had met so many astounding people […] It was more the choice of a lifestyle than the pottery, but pottery and the wood-burning kiln were part of it. […] when I got home I built my first little wood-burning kiln.[17]

Champy's sentiments echo those of many who became involved in pottery and woodfiring during the 1960s and 1970s, and are probably still relevant today over fifty years later.

**Ecological reasons**

Much has been written on the ecological implications of woodfiring, and despite some concerns regarding carbon emissions – woodfiring compares favourably with other methods of firing and can be considered as being carbon neutral.[18] Unlike coal, gas or oil – wood is a renewable resource. Electricity, often regarded as a clean fuel is, in many instances, generated by burning coal – which in itself is a serious pollutant.

Some potters grow their own wood specifically for firing their kilns. In regions of the world where there is a fast growth rate, such as tropical rainforest areas in Australia, trees can be ready for use in as little as five years.[19] In areas where the growth rate is much slower, some potters plant trees, replacing those they use with trees which they hope future generations will enjoy or use. In the late 1980s Bernard Leach's grandson, John Leach, planted some 3,500 indigenous trees near his Somerset studio.[20] Meanwhile in Devon, Svend Bayer planted two acres of forest adjacent to his home and studio. Other potters plant trees on their property each time they fire their kiln in an attempt to offset or balance the wood they burn.

17. Claude Champy, quoted in Maurice Lambiotte, and Carole Andréani, *Céramique Contemporaine – Contemporary Pottery Collection Maurice Lambiotte*, Éditions Norma, Paris, 2007, p53.
18. Ian Jones, 'Wood: The Most Ecologically Sound Fuel?', *Woodfire '89*, proceedings of the conference held in Gulgong, Australia, in April, 1989, pp.79–83.
19. Arthur Rosser, 'Growing Trees for Woodfiring', published in the proceedings of the *Woodfire '89* conference, pp.84–87.
20. Marian Edwards, 'Making Ripples', *Studio Potter*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 1990, p.53.

### A quiet firing process

Some people chose to woodfire simply because the process is so quiet compared to firing with other fuels. Particularly in the case of oil – the equipment required for firing is distinctly noisy. Cardew described visiting the Leach pottery in St Ives during a firing shortly after the kiln there had been changed from firing with wood to oil: 'The stink, the noise, and all the attendant mechanization were enough to convince me that wood was the only fuel for me.'[21] Various types of burners available for firing with gas can also be relatively noisy. In contrast the only sound that a woodfire kiln emits is that of burning wood.

### Economic reasons

Some potters choose to fire with wood as it can be relatively inexpensive compared to other fuels. This was an important consideration following the international oil crisis at the start of the 1970s. At that time wood was widely available, either very cheaply, or entirely free as a waste product from sawmills or industry. As oil prices increased dramatically, changing to firing with wood offered an economically viable alternative. However, when the labour that is necessary for its preparation is taken into account, wood can work out as being relatively costly in terms of time and energy, compared to other fuels. Another factor that has to be considered is the amount of space required for storage. Wood must be stacked and seasoned undercover for up to a year or more prior to use, depending on local weather, drying conditions, and the type of wood. This is one of the reasons that the majority of those who woodfire choose to live in rural areas.

### Woodfiring in an Educational Context

Ceramic artist and educator Sadashi Inuzuka wrote describing his approach to using woodfiring as part of his teaching, 'woodfiring as a process and experience is an invaluable part of education and what is learned can be applied to any field and any method.'[22] Woodfiring is acknowledged as a valuable learning experience, not only in teaching about the practical aspects of using a solid fuel to transform clay into fired ceramics, but to encourage participation and a sense of shared responsibility in students who may not otherwise have an opportunity of working together. It is often students from other departments (besides the art department), many of whom may never have the opportunity

21. Michael Cardew, *A Pioneer Potter* (first published 1988), Oxford University Press 1989 edition, p.40.
22. Sadashi Inuzuka, 'Woodfiring in Contemporary Art Education', *The Log Book*, issue 7, 2001, pp.17–20. See also Troy, 1995, op. cit., pp.135–142.

for such an activity again in the future, who are amongst the most enthusiastic and diligent participants in woodfirings. Their tutors consider that this experience provides a valuable and rare opportunity for team building and acquiring other inter-personal skills.

On the relevance of woodfiring in an educational context, woodfirer and educator Jason Hess stated:

> I can think of no better teaching tool in ceramics than the wood[fire] kiln. It is one of the most effective means to teach about all aspects of ceramics – from aesthetics, chemistry, and materials, to history. It is in many ways the ultimate ceramic experience. What better way to educate or excite a student than involve them in a hands-on process that transforms clay into ceramic, and colours it with fire. What better way to teach them [students] about combustion, and the energy and dedication that is required for the ceramic process?[23]

**The Counter Culture Movement**

The revival in woodfiring that occurred in the 1960s and 1970s coincided with the increase in popularity of pottery, and indeed crafts in general, in the generation that Peter Korn, author of *Why We Make Things and Why It Matters*, described as 'participants in the hippie counterculture who were searching for fulfilment through alternative lifestyles'.[24] Their aim was to find a worthwhile purpose in life through involvement in creative and self-expressive work.

The renewed interest in handcrafts was part of the 'self-sufficiency' or 'back-to-nature' counterculture alternative lifestyle that flourished at that time. Self-built houses, or the renovation of old properties, the growing of fruit and vegetables, eating whole foods, keeping poultry and livestock, and making as much of the furnishings for one's home as possible were all part of this independent lifestyle and belief system. In pottery, building kilns as opposed to buying expensive ready-made kilns from pottery supply manufacturers was seen as an extension of this. Using wood – which was often available free from sawmills, forestry departments, and industry as a waste product – tied in perfectly with this ethos.

23. Jason Hess, 'Woodfiring in the USA', *The Log Book*, issue 47, 2011, pp.22–26.
24. Peter Korn, *Why We Make Things and Why It Matters: The Education of a Craftsman*, David R. Godine, 2013, p.93.

## A desire to use locally occurring materials through all stages of the pottery making process

In his book *Ceramics*, art historian Philip Rawson made the point that 'the great majority of active potters feel […] that pottery, to be authentic, must convey some direct sense of its material'.[25] Since the start of the studio pottery movement in the West and the emergence of the individual potter, part of the ethos of the potter's work/lifestyle has been a strong sense of self-reliance. In contrast to the art potters who had preceded them, early studio potters sought to source and prepare their own raw materials for clays and glazes, throw their own pots, and fire their own kilns.

While many accept that inspiration from the work of past cultures is inevitable in wood-fired ceramics, as it is in the field of ceramics in general, some are taking the view that the most direct way of making work their own is through using a combination of locally found wild, native, or indigenous clays as well as rocks and minerals for glazes. By also using wood from their local area for firing, these potters consider that their work will be imbued with a sense of place, something which in the past was achieved through the then necessity of sourcing all materials locally. This methodology seems to be gaining ground in recent years, particularly amongst younger woodfire practitioners. There are many reasons for this, including a quest for unique effects resulting from the very local nature of the materials, facilitating the development of a personal aesthetic in their practice.

One young American potter David Peters has described the effect that using clay bodies developed from local clays has on his practice, 'The physical investment in the material is so high that my perspective of what clay is changes, and I approach the making in an entirely different mindset. I feel a level of awareness that is not present when I buy ready-made clay.'[26] For Peters, woodfiring is the most appropriate method of firing the work made from these clays, as he seeks 'to emphasize the innate beauty of each clay in the finished piece'.

There is also a more pragmatic reason why finding, preparing and using ones own clay and glaze materials has become an increasingly attractive option. The ceramic industry is now global in nature and consequently it has become more and more difficult to establish the

25. Philip Rawson, *Ceramics* (first published by Oxford University Press, 1971), University of Pennsylvania Press 1984 edition, p.14.
26. David Peters, 'The Power of Place', *The Log Book*, issue 59, 2014, pp.5–6.

source of the materials used to produce clays and glazes with certainty, and to insure that there is consistency and continuity in their supply and quality. Also, as industry caters for large-scale production, standardisation is the main focus. From the potter's point of view there is a blandness to the over-refined homogenous materials that are available commercially. Any regional or national characteristics in materials have been eliminated in the interests of uniformity of product. By returning to the most basic means of procuring their materials – finding and digging them themselves, albeit with the use of mechanical excavators, dumper trucks and tractor trailers in some instances, or in small quantities by hand as a special batches, potters can ensure that they have responsibility for the materials they use and are personally making decisions concerning their preparation and blending. This approach seems to be a more acceptable practice for many contemporary woodfire potters, instead of using clay from a plastic bag bought from a large supplier, which could be composed of raw materials sourced from several continents.

Just as today's potters decide to woodfire for a variety of reasons, so too did the early practitioners whose work is the subject of this study. Perhaps the main difference is in the quantity of information that is available now compared to the 1920s, 1940s, or 1950s, the decades in which these makers began their practices. The choices of all three were based on a range of factors (to be discussed more fully later) that included – their training and the types of kilns with which they were familiar; the influence of mentors who were woodfiring; the type of work they wanted to make; and their aesthetic preferences.

## 2.3: An overview of the development of high-temperature woodfiring as a process used by studio potters in the West in the twentieth century and the emergence of a range of woodfire methodologies and associated aesthetics

### Artist potters of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries

Many artist potters – forerunners of the individual or studio potters who emerged in the early twentieth century – did not generally become involved in the more technical aspects of pottery production, such as making and firing. Instead, skilled artisans carried out these tasks while the artists concentrated solely on decoration – painting and glazing, producing ceramics as art objects or art pottery.[27]

27. Clark, 1995, p.107.

While the work of some of these artist potters was fired in woodfire kilns, they were not interested in exploring the effects that could be achieved on either glazed or unglazed clay surfaces as a result of the process, and generally fired their pots protected in saggars. Others used muffle kilns which, although fired with wood, had in essence a single large saggar or muffle constructed in the chamber. This protected the ware from any possible effects of the fuel, thus preventing the risk of imperfections or blemishes on the often highly decorated surfaces of the work.

Early French artist potters, like their counterparts in other Western countries during the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, drew inspiration from the high-fired glazed wares from the Orient, especially China and Japan. Influenced by the Japanese stoneware pottery, including Tea Wares, that they saw at the *Exposition Universelle* in Paris in 1878, many French potters, notably Ernest Chaplet (1835–1909), began working in stoneware in the 1880s.[28] Ceramist and sculptor Jean Carriès (1855–1894) moved to the traditional woodfire pottery village of Saint-Amand-en-Puisaye in central-eastern France in 1888, where he produced organic forms in stoneware, with flowing matt glazes applied in such a manner that areas of the surfaces were left unglazed. His colleague Paul Jeanneney (1861–1920), a sculptor from Paris who had worked with Rodin, initially rented in 1906, and eventually bought a pottery in Saint-Amand-en-Puisaye, so that the large clay sculptures that he created could be fired in the existing traditional 100m³ woodfire kiln.[29]

**Early studio potters – Leach and Cardew**

Bernard Leach and Hamada Shōji (1894–1978) built the first oriental type climbing woodfire kiln in the Western world at St Ives in Cornwall in 1920. It was a design of kiln with which Leach was probably already familiar, as it was still widely used in traditional potteries in Japan in the early part of the twentieth century.[30] Although problematic to fire, this kiln is known to have produced some very satisfactory results, as evidenced by reviews of two exhibitions of work by Hamada shown in London prior to his return to Japan in 1923.[31] kiln

28. Edmund de Waal, *20th Century Ceramics*, Thames and Hudson, 2003, pp.18, 25–26.
29. *Poterie Jacques-Jeanneny*, booklet published by the Association pour la Sauvegarde du Patrimonie Potier en Puisaye, 2003. See also 'Poterie Jacques-Jeanneney', by Coll Minogue, published in *The Log Book*, issue16, 2003, pp.13–20. http://asppp.free.fr/english
30. This situation in Japan was to change when there was a clampdown on woodfiring in urban areas in an effort to improve air quality in the 1960s. See Daniel Rhodes, *Kilns – Design, Construction and Operation*, Chilton, 1981, p.53. Also see Frederick L. Olsen, *The Kiln Book* (second edition), A&C Black, 1983, p.78.
31. The first was reviewed favourably in *The Spectator*, 26th May 1923, the second in *The Times,* 1st Nov., 1923.

The Japanese potter and kiln builder Matsubayashi Tsurunosuke (1894–1932) rebuilt the kiln in 1924 (see Figure 3, page 45).

As one of the founding members of what developed into the studio pottery movement, Leach's documentation of his experience as a potter had a profound impact on the development of pottery in Western countries during subsequent decades. His advice to aspiring potters and his philosophy were published in his influential volume *A Potter's Book*, first published in 1940, in which he vouches for the superiority of woodfiring:

> Generally, a long flame, free of impurities such as sulphur, gives the best results. Because of this light and resinous wood, despite the labour involved, has many advantages. It is interesting to note that besides having been employed from the very beginning in all the old potteries of the world, including those which produced the most beautiful quality of glaze, wood is still used at Sèvres.[32]

Woodfiring was perceived as being part of the overall ethos of pottery making as a fulfilling way of life, as expounded by Leach. His writings can be regarded as one of the primary factors that contributed to the resurgence of woodfiring amongst studio potters, particularly from the 1960s. The process of woodfiring was seen as part of the lifestyle associated with being the kind of potter that Leach wrote about, making the type of pots that he advocated, by many of his 'followers', and those who were inspired by his philosophy. Leach's influence on studio pottery in the twentieth century, and the decision made by many potters to opt for woodfiring, had an impact far beyond Britain.

The style of pottery and associated aesthetics that Leach developed are described as 'Anglo-Oriental', at the core of which was what has become known as 'the Sung Standard', which deemed the work produced during the Sung Dynasty in China to be the epitome of good pottery and the standard to which contemporary potters should aspire. The pots that Leach admired and discussed with his trainees in showing them examples from his personal collection,[33] included historical and traditional pieces from China, Korea and Japan, of which most, if not all, were wood-fired.

32. Leach, *A Potter's Book* (1973 edition), pp.179–180.
33. George Wingfield Digby, 'Pots of Inspiration – Bernard Leach's Personal Collection at the Holburne Museum, Bath', *The Burlington Magazine,* Vol. 121, No. 915 (June 1979), pp.400–401.

Michael Cardew, who was an apprentice at St Ives from 1923–26 was, after Leach arguably the most influential figure in the early studio pottery movement. He participated in firings of the woodfire kiln and assisted Matsubayashi in rebuilding it. When he established his own pottery at Winchcombe in Gloucestershire, the existing bottle kiln that he used throughout his time there was fired with a combination of coal, wood and faggots.[34] Further to his move to a new workshop at Wenford Bridge in Cornwall in 1939, Cardew constructed a large, round, woodfire kiln, based on the bottle kiln at Winchcombe.

In his book *Pioneer Pottery*, first published in 1969, Cardew strongly endorsed woodfiring, making the observation that 'for most people, it is easier to produce good pots with a wood-fired kiln than with oil, gas or electricity'.[35] He also drew attention to the attributes that woodfiring could, in his view, bestow on work:

> I think there are few today whose art has attained such a degree of rectification that they no longer need the friendly cover of uncertainty which woodfiring provides, administering a kind of general absolution for the things we have done which we ought to have done differently, and disguising the faults of the pots with an accidental charm which is at once comforting and somehow flattering, since it comes not from the artist himself but from his materials.[36]

These are not necessarily views shared by all, especially professional woodfirers, as will be discussed later in this chapter. In 1949 Cardew added a down-draught chamber to the original up-draught kiln (see Figure 4, page 45).[37] The new addition, which had Bourry-type fireboxes and was designed for firing to stoneware temperatures, was based on the kiln that he had adapted to incorporate Bourry type fireboxes in West Africa in 1942.[38]

In view of the subsequent emphasis by woodfirers later in the twentieth century on the direct effects achievable on clay surfaces from firing with wood, it is significant to note that much of the work at the Leach Pottery was fired in saggars, thus protected from flame and flyash. Cardew also fired in saggars. Later woodfirers have commented that neither Leach nor Cardew had an interest in natural ash effects achievable through woodfiring. Jack Troy

34. Coal was used up to 800°C., and cordwood and faggots were used to reach top temperature. Ray Finch, quoted in Minogue and Sanderson, 2000, p.22.
35. Michael Cardew, *Pioneer Pottery* (first published 1969), Longman edition 1977, pp.170–171.
36. Ibid, p.171.
37. Ibid, pp.185–201.
38. The kiln was built at Achimoto College in the Gold Coast, Ghana.

makes the point that *A Potter's Book* 'contains not a single visual or verbal reference to this genre of ceramic expression',[39] and comments on 'the genre of kiln-glazed ceramic work avoided in the writings of Leach and Cardew – the two primary sources for information about woodfiring in English'.[40]

The types of work and attitudes to pottery that were current at the time in which both Leach and Cardew began their practices should be borne in mind in this context, and also the fact that they both wanted to make vessels, including utilitarian pottery for use. Leach made predominantly functional work, while Cardew's work consisted entirely of functional pieces, albeit that some of his larger pieces were not perhaps entirely practical for use. Despite embracing Japanese processes, Leach took inspiration from Chinese classic Sung wares. It has been argued that Leach's influence from Japan was not Japanese pottery itself, but the way in which he learned to look at a pot.[41] For Cardew the dominant inspiration was traditional slipware, particularly from North Devon. Pronounced woodfire surface effects were not readily associated with either of these types of work.

**Later in the century – from the 1940s**

Traditional potteries firing with wood survived much longer in France than in other industrialised areas of the world. When a renewed interest in pottery developed there in the twentieth century, as it did in many other countries in the West, the new potters and artists looked to the existing traditional potteries as places where they could develop their skills and also avail of firing space in some of the huge woodfire kilns that were still in use. In the early part of the twentieth century La Borne was still a thriving rural pottery centre and it was not until after the First World War that a slow decline began to be experienced there.[42] From the 1940s onwards artists and artist potters were attracted to traditional pottery villages such as La Borne and St Amand-en-Puisaye. Though woodfire kilns in the region had traditionally been large-scale communal types (as will be seen in Chapter 4 on Jacqueline Lerat), from the early 1940s potters began using small-scale kilns based on the design of the large kilns used in Sèvres in the manufacture of porcelain. As the century and

39. Troy, 1995, p.xi.
40. Ibid, p.15.
41. Clark, 1995, p.147.
42. Gwyn Hanssen, 'The Potters of Haut-Berry', *Pottery in Australia*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 1969. Hanssen (later Hanssen Pigott), who had been living and working near La Borne since 1966, described the decline of the traditional potteries that she was witnessing there. Reprinted in *The Log Book* issue 47, 2011, pp.15–21.

the studio pottery movement progressed various designs of small woodfire kilns became popular in different countries. The types of kilns used are of significance as the design of kiln has a direct bearing on the results achievable in woodfiring.

In 1982 the results of a woodfire survey conducted in the USA were published in *Studio Potter* magazine.[43] There were 73 respondents and the results showed that there were several different designs of kilns then in use – the most popular being the catenary-arch type (17 of them, or 23%). The next in popularity was the fastfire type (with 11, or 15%). In contrast there were 8 climbing kilns and 8 anagama, each representing 11% of the total respondents. These statistics indicate that in the USA in the early 1980s long-duration firing in single chamber kilns was still much less popular than firing in other types of kilns suited to shorter firing cycles.

Four years later in 1986 the first woodfire survey was carried out in Australia. The results, contributed by 60 respondents, were published in *Woodfire '86*, the proceedings of the first Australian woodfire conference. They showed that 23 Bourry-box kilns were in use, or 38% of the total number. There were 12 fastfire types (20%). In contract there were 11 kilns listed as long-fire 'Orientals', which were most commonly described as anagama style kilns.

A similar survey conducted in Britain in 1990 by Coll Minogue and Robert Sanderson, had 39 respondents – 24 in England, 8 in Scotland, and 7 in Wales. The results were published the following year in *Ceramic Review*.[44] These showed that of the total number of kilns included, the most popular were fastfire types – 16 of them, or 41%. Next in popularity were Bourry-box types –11, or 28%. One remarkable finding was that there was just one anagama, and three climbing kilns.

These survey findings indicate that then, as now, potters were firing with wood with the aim of achieving a wide range of aesthetic outcomes. The catenary arch kiln that was particularly popular in the USA in the 1970s and early 1980s was suitable for shorter firing cycles and achieving light ash effects, as exemplified in the work of an early proponent of this design, Ruth Gowdy McKinley (1931–1981). Gowdy McKinley, who was one of the first

43. Malcolm Wright, 'Woodfiring', *Studio Potter*, Vol. 11, No. 1, pp.10–11.
44. Coll Minogue and Robert Sanderson, 'Woodfire Survey 1990' results of the first woodfire survey conducted in Britain, *Ceramic Review*, No. 131, Sept.–Oct. 1991, pp.18–19.

women to become involved in high-temperature woodfiring in the USA when she participated in building woodfire kilns during her studies at Alfred University, New York in 1954–55, succeeded in demonstrating the range of effects that could be achieved on both glazed and unglazed work, woodfiring in a small kiln (0.4m$^3$) over a 26-hour firing cycle.[45]

The type of firebox used by Cardew, now known in English speaking countries as the Bourry-box,[46] became more widespread in Australia than in Britain. Ivan McMeekin, who had worked with Cardew at Wenford Bridge introduced the design to Australia when he built the first such kiln there in 1954. Due to its facility for accurate air control it was suitable for burning the native Australian eucalyptus hardwood, and was the most popular kiln at the time of the 1986 survey. It gave light ash effects on the surfaces of work and was very suitable for firing utilitarian ware, which was the category of work that the majority of the potters who participated in the survey were producing at that time (40 out of 60). The fastfire type of kiln which was the most popular kiln in use in Britain at the time of the 1990 survey, with its relatively short firing cycle and light ash effects, was seen to be an appropriate method of firing domestic functional ware, which was the type of work produced by the majority of respondents.

All three surveys also considered the question of the aesthetic concerns associated with woodfiring, in that the question was asked 'What are you trying to achieve through woodfiring?'. Thus, in the USA survey, responses to the question included a range of desired outcomes – the mark of the fire, flashing, ash deposits, richness, subtle surfaces, warmth, glaze effects, natural colour variations. The same question in the Australian and British surveys elicited a similar range of responses.

The results of these surveys, spanning the eight-year period from 1982 to 1990, indicate that there was a wide variety of kilns in use prior to and throughout the 1980s. It was after these surveys were carried out that there was a somewhat dramatic increase in interest in particular aspects of historical Japanese pottery, including the building of generally large-

45. Gowdy McKinley's comprehensive sixteen-page account of her woodfiring practice in Canada from 1968 onwards was published in the *Studio Potter* magazine in 1974, at a time when there was still relatively little information available on the subject. Ruth Gowdy McKinley, 'The Mark of This Fire, *Studio Potter*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1974, pp.30–46.
46. It is known as such as it was documented by the French engineer Émile Bourry in his book *A Treatise on Ceramic Industries* (first published in French in 1897; first English edition 1901). It was not in fact designed by Bourry, as has sometimes been stated.

scale single chamber oriental inspired kilns, in which effects could be achieved that were similar to those displayed in the historical work. Edmund de Waal described this development as 'the explosion in popularity in the 1990s of wood-firing in a Japanese 'anagama' or climbing kiln'.[47] Many of the larger kilns, particularly in the USA, were built in educational institutions.

**Developments from the 1990s onwards**

What were the reasons behind this relatively sudden growth in the popularity of these types of kilns and their associated aesthetics, which occurred initially primarily in the USA, but also in Australia, and to a lesser extent in Europe?

The single chamber anagama or 'tunnel', or 'cave' type kiln which has had, and continues to have, such a strong and defining influence on contemporary woodfiring internationally, was first used in Japan in the fifth century. Based on kiln technology that had been developed in China, it was introduced to Japan by way of the Korean Peninsula. The anagama was eventually superseded by the multi-chambered noborigama in the 17th century, which was a much more efficient design and was used extensively throughout Japan for several centuries, during which time anagama technology was discontinued and largely forgotten.

A movement developed in Japan in the 1930s as a reaction to the rapid industrialisation and modernisation that had occurred in the country once its doors had been opened to the west during the Meiji period (1868–1912), after some 300 years of isolation. Known as 'The Momoyama Revival Movement' its adherents set out to rediscover and revive traditional pottery techniques, including firing and glazing as practiced during the Momoyama period (1573–1615). They did so by studying medieval kiln sites and seeking shards and kiln remains, in the belief that the fired effects they sought to reproduce could only be achieved if they used the same type of kilns in which the original wares had been fired.

The first anagama to be built in Japan in modern times was a semi-underground Momoyama period type, built by Arakawa Toyozō (1894–1985) in 1933 in his quest to

47. de Waal, 2003, p.19.

recreate Mino glazes of the period.[48] Also in the 1930s, in another of the traditional pottery areas – Bizen – Kaneshige Tōyō (1896–1967) rediscovered and revived processes including clay preparation, kiln technology, and firing techniques to achieve the effects that were associated with ware produced there during the Momoyama period.[49] The famous gourmand, restaurateur, calligrapher and potter Rosanjin Kitaōji (1883–1959), who is also considered a key figure of the Momoyama Revival movement, reinterpreted traditional forms, glazes, and decoration in his work, producing pieces inspired by pottery from many different areas including Shigaraki, Bizen and Mino. His aim was not to copy the medieval wares directly, but to make work which, while similar in style, was 'unmistakably his own'.[50]

Kohyama Yasuhisa (b.1936) built an anagama in Shigaraki in 1969,[51] and Furutani Michio (1946–2001), who built a total of 30 kilns during his career, built his first anagama, also in Shigaraki, in 1970.[52] These kilns based on medieval models were the forerunners of what has been estimated as the thousands of anagama that have been built, not only throughout Japan, but worldwide, during the past five decades.

The effects achieved in anagama firing are distinctive. They result from work being stacked in the kiln so that it is in direct contact with the flames or buried beneath ash and embers during firings, which can continue for up to eight to ten days, or longer. In anagama firing pieces are often fired without the use of kiln shelves. This is a technique which is referred to as 'tumble stacking', where pots or sculptural forms are fired one on top of the other. The packing of an anagama has been described as 'a complex relationship between meticulous planning and hopeful natural happenings'.[53]

Leach's views on pottery became influential in the USA, particularly from the 1950s. He first visited the country in 1949 and again in 1952, this second time accompanied by his

48. Janet Barriskill, *Visiting the Mino Kilns* with a translation of Arakawa Toyozo's *'The Traditions and Techniques of Mino Pottery*', University of Sydney, 1995, pp.1–4.
49. See Louise Allison Cort's essay 'Japanese Encounters with Clay', in *Isamu Noguchi – Modern Japanese Ceramics: A Close Embrace of the Earth*, by Louise Allison Cort, and Berth Winther-Tamaki, the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution in association with the University of California Press, 2003, p.127, for a detailed description of these processes and the effects achieved by Kaneshige.
50. Ibid, p130.
51. Susan Jeffries et al., *Yasuhisa Kohyama The Art of Ceramics*, Arnoldsche Art Publishers, 2012, p.17.
52. Furutani's book *Anagama: Chikuyou to Shousei (Anagama Construction and Firing),* 1994, is an important resource on this type of kiln.
53. Peter Callas, 'Woodfiring: Historical Obligation or Fashionable Fire', *The Log Book*, issue 31, 2007, p.16.

colleagues Hamada and the philosopher Yanagi Sōetsu (1889–1961). Leach and Hamada demonstrated making processes while Yanagi presented lectures at the various venues they visited. Hamada's relaxed working methods inspired an interest in a Japanese approach to ceramics, in many of those who saw him.[54] His loose and spontaneous throwing and decorating techniques were in marked contrast to those being taught in educational institutions in the USA at that time, where emphasis was placed on symmetry and accuracy, striving to achieve perfection in tightly thrown, classically inspired forms.

Both Hamada's method of working and Yanagi's philosophy on crafts were in tune with the widespread interest in Zen Buddhism that existed in the West at the time.[55] Writing about American potters and Japanese woodfiring in the 1950s, Louise Allison Cort stated that:

> An atmosphere of receptivity to Asian aesthetics of asymmetry, simplicity, and often random abstract decoration was supported by a popular interest in Zen Buddhism, stimulated by poet Alan Watts and philosopher Suzuki Daisetz'.[56]

Amongst those in attendance at the presentations by the three visitors to the Archie Bray Foundation in Montana was Peter Voulkos (1924–2002). The interest in Zen beliefs was in keeping with the desire of artists, including Voulkos, to achieve a sense of unselfconsciousness in their work. This interest later extended to incorporate an appreciation of the random surface qualities that could be achieved through woodfiring. In an article 'Abstract Expressionism Revisited: The Otis Years 1954–1959', Garth Clark stated that: 'Fuelled by Leach's evangelical zeal, potters throughout the US were turning to Japan for inspiration, not just in their art but also its underlying spiritual identity of Zen Buddhism.'[57]

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54. Elaine Levin, *The History of American Ceramics: From Pipkins and Bean Pots to Contemporary Forms 1607 to the present*, Harry N. Abrams, 1988, p.199; Ulysses Grant Diez, 'American Ceramics and the Divergence of Craft and Art', published in, Jeannine Falino, Editor, *Crafting Modernism – Mid-century American Art and Design*, Abrams New York, in association with the Museum of Art and Design, 2011, p.165.
55. Patricia Failing, 'The Archie Bray Foundation: A Legacy Reframed', published in *A Ceramic Continuum – Fifty Years of the Archie Bray Influence*, 2001. Also, Rick Newby and Chere Jiusto, 'A Beautiful Spirit – Origins of the Archie Bray Foundation for the Ceramic Arts', published in the same volume, pp.27–30.
56. Louise Allison Cort, 'A Short History of Woodfiring in America', in *The Great Shigaraki Exhibition: Rediscovery and Revival of the Beauty of Yakishime Stoneware*, catalogue of the exhibition shown at the Museum of Contemporary Ceramic Art, Shigaraki, Japan, 2001, pp.183–4. Reprinted in *The Log Book*, issues 9 to 12, 2001.
57. Garth Clark, 'Abstract Expressionism Revisited – The Otis Years 1954–1959', *Ceramics Art and Perception*, Issue 29, 1997, pp.33–40.

Western potters were motivated to visit, study, train and establish studios in Japan from as early as the 1950s due to their appreciation for the historical wood-fired pots that had been produced, and also the work of contemporary Japanese potters. Two figures of the Momoyama Revival movement, Kaneshige and Rosanjin made influential visits to the USA in the 1950s and held exhibitions of their work, providing many potters there with an opportunity to view the kinds of pottery they made for the first time. Others were attracted to visit and train in Japan by Hamada's work and that of Shimaoka Tatsuzō (1919–2007), who had trained with him. The fact that pottery has traditionally occupied a position of great prestige within the context of Japanese culture was an added incentive for potters to visit the country.

Rob Barnard stated in an article in *Ceramics Monthly* in 1991 that 'woodfiring as an aesthetic had a historical precedent in late 16th century Japan', and continued, 'the knowledge that woodfiring is still culturally, and aesthetically important in modern Japan is what attracted American potters who were looking for a historical premise within the language of ceramic art for their own aesthetic inclinations and philosophical concerns'.[58]

From the early 1950s onwards a succession of American potters, ceramics teachers, and students travelled to Japan to gain direct experience, visiting and working in the studios of Japanese potters.[59] Among the earliest of these was Janet Darnell, later Leach, on her marriage to Bernard Leach. She was the first American woman to study in a traditional woodfire pottery in Japan.[60] In the following years Frederick Olsen, Doug Lawrie, Malcolm Wright, Rob Barnard, Richard Bresnahan, John Neely, Randy Johnston, Paul Chaleff, Peter Callas, Marie Woo, Donna Gilliss, and Joy Brown, travelled and studied in Japan. All went on to become influential woodfire potters, ceramic artists, and educators.[61]

In the 1970s, two books were published which brought traditional pottery areas in Japan to the attention of potters in the West. The first was *Tamba Pottery*, by potter and educator

58. Rob Barnard, 'The Shakers Versus the Rockettes', *Ceramics Monthly*, April 1991, pp.86–88.
59. In 1992 *Studio Potter* magazine included several articles examining the subject of American potters who studied in Japan, and exchanges between the two countries (Vol. 21, Number 1, 1992).
60. Harriet Brisson, 'Janet Darnel Leach', *Ceramics Monthly*, January 1982, pp.32–35. See also 'Janet Leach: American Foreigner', by Janet Leach, *Studio Potter*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 1983.
61. *Studio Potter*, Vol. 21, Number 1, 1992.

Daniel Rhodes,[62] published in 1970. Rhodes traced the history of the kilns in Tachikui – the last remaining pottery village of the Tamba region where, due to its geographic isolation, there was still a continuity with past pottery processes. The illustrations of the Old Tamba jars in the book were particularly powerful and resonated with potters in the West, many of whom were seeing this type of work for the first time. Made of coarse local clay fired to a variety of rich, irregularly flashed red-brown and grey-brown colours, the jars were unglazed except for the natural ash glaze resulting from woodfiring.

The second book was *Shigaraki – Potters' Valley*, by Louise Allison Cort, published in 1979.[63] Covering a period of some 700 years in the history of Shigaraki, Cort provides unprecedented insights into all aspects of this traditional pottery-making region, its people, economic and social structures, history, culture, materials and processes. The work illustrated – including storage jars and tea ceremony wares – was important in making known to potters in the West the qualities of the local clays of the region, which fire to a red-orange colour in oxidation. A distinctive feature of the relatively low iron content clay is the naturally occurring feldspar fragments, which show as intense shiny white globules in the finished, fired surface, contrasting with the clay colour.

In Australia, Leach's ideology had a major impact on potters, particularly through *A Potter's Book*. Initially influenced by the Anglo-Oriental style developed and espoused by him, later, due to their proximity to Asia, potters increasingly looked directly to the primary sources for inspiration. As Australian potter and author Damon Moon pointed out 'Australian potters formed stronger ties to Japan in the post-war period than did English potters, and this allowed Australians to contrast their own experiences of Japan with Leach's persuasively argued but highly subjective view of Japanese pottery'.[64]

Influential pioneer studio potter Peter Rushforth (1920–2015) was one of the first Australian potters to visit Japan from the early 1960s, attracted by the Japanese philosophy of making work using local materials, the type of work produced there, and the method of firing. As a

62. Daniel Rhodes, *Tamba Pottery*, Kodansha International, 1970.
63. Louise Allison Cort, *Shigaraki – Potters Valley*, Kodansha International, 1979.
64. Damon Moon, In the Beginning was the Word: Bernard Leach and Australian Studio Pottery from 1940–1964, unpublished PhD thesis, University of South Australia, 2006, p.xii.

teacher at the National Art School in Sydney for over twenty-five years Rushforth had a significant impact in promoting woodfiring amongst Australian ceramics students.
In summing up the findings of the 1990 British woodfire survey, I commented that:

> In the past, specific styles of woodfire kilns have been developed or made popular in one country, later the use of these kilns spread to many other countries, such was the case with the Fastfire kiln. Perhaps the 'long fire Oriental style kiln, with its accompanying aesthetic, is set to become more generally widespread in the near future – including here in Britain.[65]

One possible reason why the use of the anagama did not become as popular in Britain throughout the 1990s, as it did in the USA and Australia, may be that the Leach/Anglo-Oriental influence remained stronger in Britain for longer than in either of these countries. Another reason was undoubtedly the fact that the generation of potters, who were by the 1990s involved in pottery education in Britain, had not themselves travelled to Japan unlike their American and Australian counterparts, and so they did not advise or inspire their students to do so.

In his article in *Studio Potter* magazine based on the results of the 1982 woodfire survey Malcolm Wright concluded:

> American woodfiring as an expressive medium is not as established as say, American raku, which became a new idiom a long time ago. However, there are few potters who have abandoned their European or Oriental roots in favor of forms designed to utilize the directional flow of the flame and ash deposits – an approach to form inspired by the nature of woodfiring. How to do woodfiring is no longer the problem for American potters; the question now is, 'To what end?'[66]

Relatively early in the resurgence of woodfiring in the West, a stage was reached when it was generally accepted that the technical aspects of the process were no longer the main challenge for practitioners. Discussion moved instead to considering how the technique could and should be used. While the aesthetics of the work produced by methods based on technologies that had developed in the West had historical touchstones to reference, the question of how to develop an aesthetic around work produced by technology that

65. Minogue and Sanderson, '1990 British Woodfire Survey Results', op. cit.
66. Malcolm Wright, 1982 US Woodfire Survey Results, op. cit.

had been introduced /transferred from South-east Asia in recent decades was relatively new territory, and was seen by some commentators as presenting something of a dilemma.

The term 'wood-fired' in the context of ceramics encompasses a very wide range of genres of work and associated aesthetics. It has been stated that the type of work and accompanying aesthetic that most readily comes to mind in the context of wood-fired ceramics produced in the West in the twentieth century are those of anagama fired work. This indicates a somewhat narrow view of the wood-fired ceramics produced throughout the century, by concentrating on a specific genre that, as was shown by the results of the three surveys, had not become prevalent in the West before the last decade or two of the century. It could be argued that anagama-fired work received a disproportionate level of coverage in the ceramics 'press', due in part to the portrayal of anagama firings as somewhat spectacular events on a huge scale involving tremendous effort, and that it is as a result of this exposure that many consider it to be the most prevalent and popular method of firing practiced in the West in the twentieth century.

In a 2009 lecture author and critic Tanya Harrod stated that 'Firing is a central activity for those who use anagama kilns. A pot that comes out of such a kiln could be read as a kind of memory of an extended and dramatic performance'.[67] This statement can be partly extended to include woodfiring in all kinds of woodfire kilns, in that firing is 'a central activity' for all who woodfire. Equally a pot that comes out of any woodfiring can be read as 'a kind of memory' of the firing process it has undergone (as discussed above). It is with Harrod's use of the term 'dramatic performance' that professional woodfire potters and artists who use anagama kilns might take issue.

In his book *The Art of Woodfire – A Contemporary Ceramics Practice*, published in Australia in 2011, Owen Rye states that 'Woodfire' now usually means 'ceramics fired in an anagama-style kiln'.[68] This opinion does not acknowledge the full range of approaches to woodfiring that are currently practiced. In fact, the work illustrated in Rye's book includes pieces wood-fired in several different types of kilns. In an article published in *The Log Book* in 2005, Rye

67. 'Out of the Studio', the 11th Annual Dorothy Wilson Perkins Lecture presented at the Schein-Joseph International Museum of Ceramic Art at Alfred University, New York. Reproduced in *That Continuous Thing*, Tate St Ives, 2017, p.94.
68. Rye, 2011, p.16.

had stated that 'In the Western world there are as many woodfire "aesthetics" as there are woodfiriers'.[69] Jack Troy, in the first book to be published on contemporary wood-fired ceramics (1995), discusses a wide range of work produced in a variety of kilns,[70] and in the second specialist publication on the subject, a similarly diverse range of work is illustrated and discussed by the authors Coll Minogue and Robert Sanderson (2000).[71]

While there is no denying that the historical ceramics of Southeast Asia, and perhaps Japanese medieval wares in particular, have exerted a powerful influence on many contemporary woodfire potters and ceramic artists, there are others whose work has drawn inspiration from different sources, such as the traditional wood-fired work produced in central France from the 15th century, and in Germany. Even at the height of what could be considered the Japanese influence, arguably the early 1990s, many potters were building kilns and producing work that was not inspired by, or based on Southeast Asian aesthetics within ceramics.

In her essay 'A Short History of Woodfiring in America' referenced earlier, under the heading 'Cool, Calm Woodfiring', Louise Allison Cort discussed an article about the Bourry-box that was published in the *Studio Potter* in 1980, as introducing 'another significant alternative to Japanese models for wood-fired kilns'. Later in the essay Cort described firings in Karen Karnes and Ann Stannard's Bourry-box type kiln, stating that 'This vision of woodfiring could not have been further from the image of fiery mystery conveyed by the Japanese-trained anagama users. Both these visions operate with equal power in American approaches to woodfiring.'[72] These diverse approaches continue in contemporary woodfire practices.

Rob Barnard, one of the most eloquent and insightful contemporary commentators on ceramics, including wood-fired ceramics, has in his writing cautioned against the dangers inherent in woodfiring 'The challenge in making unglazed work lies not in the achievement of a multitude of unusual effects on a piece, but in the creation of work that transcends effect and technique'.[73] While Barnard was in this instance referring specifically to firing in

69. Owen Rye, 'Aesthetics: Comment', *The Log Book*, issue 23, 2005, p.14.
70. Troy, 1995.
71. Minogue and Sanderson, 2000.
72. Published in the catalogue of the Great Shigaraki Exhibition: Rediscovery and Revival of the Beauty of Yakishime Stoneware, p.187. Reprinted in *The Log Book* issues 9 to 12, 2001.
73. Rob Barnard, 'Transcending Woodfire', *Studio Potter*, Volume 11, Number 1, 1982, p.38.

an anagama over an extended period of several days, his words of caution can equally be applied to other methods of woodfiring, which although perhaps more subtle in outcome in terms of surface effects and lacking the 'thick brilliant green ash glazes, unexpected dents, warping, cracks, and brightly colored scorch marks' to which Barnard makes reference, are also transformed during the firing process.

There seems to be a view that the process of woodfiring can transform a pot and somehow improve it. Perhaps this view can be traced back to comments, such as those made by Cardew (see above). Such views can contribute to a misconception in the minds of some aspiring woodfirers, that everything begins and ends with the process, with no further thought beyond that as to the appropriateness of their work for the type of firing, or other relevant considerations. The notion that the process of woodfiring alone can make a pot a better one is certainly misguided. Barnard has recounted advice that he received from his teacher Yagi Kazuo when he was a student at Kyoto City University of Fine Arts in 1974, cautioning him against becoming involved in woodfiring at that early stage in his training. As Barnard recalled, Yagi advised that 'until I could make compelling work using commercial glazes, commercial clay and an electric kiln […] I ran the risk of remaining on the surface of ceramic art, never penetrating its depths and potential'.[74]

Despite the relatively high level of coverage of woodfiring and wood-fired ceramics in all their many aspects in ceramics publications, apparent confusion still exists concerning the terminology associated with different areas of the practice; effects achievable in different types of kilns, and the kiln types associated with particular aesthetics. In *Things of Beauty Growing*, the catalogue accompanying the major exhibition of British studio pottery, of the same title, that originated at the Yale Centre for British Art in the USA in 2017 and was later shown at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge in Britain, Glenn Adamson wrote that: 'All were urban makers […] and used small gas-fired or electric kilns […], rather than the rustic wood-fired anagama kiln favoured by the likes of Leach and Cardew.'[75]

74. Rob Barnard, 'The Illusion of Achievement – Mistaking Appearance for Essence', *The Log Book*, issue 57, 2014, p.12.
75. Glenn Adamson, introduction to section titled 'Vessel', in *Things of Beauty Growing*, Yale University Press, 2017, pp.290–1.

This is not only incorrect in reference to the types of the kilns that Leach and Cardew used (in fact, these were quite different from each other), but also in terms of the aesthetics of the work associated with anagama, compared to those of the kilns used by the two potters. It was several decades after the first anagama in modern times was built in Japan in 1933, before any such kilns were built in the West.[76] The kilns built at the Leach Pottery in 1920 and 1924, were, as has been seen, climbing kilns (noborigama, of two and three chambers respectively), based on Korean and Japanese models. The kilns that Cardew used were of designs that were European in origin – firstly at Winchcombe a traditional up-draught Bottle kiln, and later a series of round chambered kilns with Bourry fireboxes in both in Africa and at Wenford Bridge. The single chamber anagama type kiln is generally used for firing over several days with the aim of building up successive layers of natural ash glaze on the surfaces of the work. Both Leach and Cardew fired their work in saggars in their woodfire kilns, thus protecting it from the direct effects of flame and ash.

At the time that Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie began her practice incorporating a woodfire kiln, the concept of woodfire aesthetics in relation to different types of wood-fired work did not exist in the West in the sense that is widely understood today. While the fact that her work was wood-fired, albeit in saggars, undoubtedly contributed to its aesthetic qualities, this was not referenced in any contemporary commentary. When Jacqueline Lerat's work was wood-fired for the first time it was in a large traditional kiln in La Borne, which was the only means of firing available to her at that particular stage in her training. Thereafter she made the decision to woodfire throughout her career on aesthetic grounds. When Gwyn Hanssen Pigott began her apprenticeship the kiln in the workshop where she trained was wood-fired. She later chose to continue woodfiring when she established her own studios for the effects it contributed to her work.

The initial involvement of all three makers in woodfiring occurred under different circumstances than those that prevail today. Now the decision to woodfire is likely to be made based on an attraction to wood-fired work, either contemporary or historical, as opposed to woodfiring being one of the first methods of firing experienced by the potter.

76. It is considered that one of the first, if not the first anagama in the USA was built by Peter Callas in 1976.

## 2.4: The subtle wood-fired ceramics and associated aesthetics that are the focus of this thesis and comparisons with other genres of wood-fired ceramics

The glazed ware produced during the Sung Dynasty in China (960–1279) has exerted a powerful influence on potters in the West since the work first became more widely known in the early twentieth century. Sung Dynasty ceramics are characterised by monochromatic glazes in subtle tones, combined with simple, yet strong forms. By using a similar range of materials in the composition of their glazes and firing in woodfire kilns, potters inspired by Sung ceramics aspired to achieving qualities that would be comparable to the classic Sung wares, rather than attempting to replicate them.

Both Katherine Pleydell-Bouverie and Gwyn Hanssen Pigott were strongly influenced by Sung ceramics. Pleydell-Bouverie's soft, matt-glazed surfaces on forms which were also inspired by classic Chinese examples; Hanssen Pigott's meticulously glazed vessels, on the surfaces of which 'there is a cloudiness, or a softness, or a change of tone, that speaks of the flame path'.[77] (See Chapters 3 and 5 for the influence of Sung wares on Pleydell-Bouverie and Hanssen Pigott respectively.) The surfaces of Jacqueline Lerat's abstract sculptures with engobes and pigments applied in a painterly process contributed to their quiet tones, which, when accentuated by flame and flyash from firing were perfectly suited to the forms.

The work of these makers has many characteristics in common. It does not demand attention nor is it busy or overworked, with so much happening on the surface that it is distracting. Instead it rewards observation over time, as there is a slow revelation of its intrinsic qualities. The particular effects achieved by each of the three, and the potential of these effects to contribute specific qualities to their work, will be examined in greater detail in later chapters.

Throughout the twentieth century as different designs of woodfire kiln evolved and were built, a range of different effects were achieved. This process continues today. Some kiln types are more suited to achieving quieter effects, often characterised by a flashing of the surface. Potters who work within the aesthetics characterised by the quiet touch of the flame generally fire in smaller kilns: often Bourry-box/Sèvres, catenary arch, fastfire, or train-type kilns. The firings are typically of 18 to 36 hours duration. Others types of kilns, including

77. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, quoted in Minogue and Sanderson, 2000, p.17.

anagama, are designed for longer firing cycles with the aim of building up layers of ash on the surface, or achieving effects resulting from work being buried under embers and cooling in reduction.

However, the dividing line between effects achievable in different types of kilns is no longer as clear-cut as it once perhaps was. It is, for instance, no longer necessary for work to be fired in an anagama, or in the firebox section of a noborigama, to achieve the effects traditionally associated with these kilns. Similar effects can be achieved in other, more recently developed kiln designs, including train kilns, which incorporate a Bourry type firebox, and 'manabigama' kilns, a type of catenary arch shaped tube kiln. Not all work fired in Oriental type kilns is heavily glazed or encrusted with ash, just as all work fired in smaller kilns of European origin in faster firing cycles, is not necessarily 'quiet' or subtle. Considering the 'Aesthetics of Woodfiring', American potter Jeff Shapiro, who fires his work in an anagama, stated:

> The range of work being produced in wood kilns is varied and particular to each maker. We are always making choices; what material to use, how to form, how to load and fire or how to decorate. My choices tend to be concerned with aesthetics, but how can you define an aesthetic that includes drippy, gnarly, and crusty surfaces as well as surfaces that are quiet, and subdued with little or no ash? The bottom line is that when the work comes out of the kiln, if it speaks to me, then it is good![78]

There are, as Shapiro references, results achieved in anagama type firings that are quiet in quality. There is also today interest in another process within woodfiring that results in surfaces that are subdued and quiet. This is the process of reduction cooling, in which the kiln is not closed down once top temperature has been reached, or, as is generally the case, after a period of soaking at top temperature (that can continue for several days) has been carried out, before being allowed to cool. Instead it is fired down in reduction until a predetermined cooling temperature has been reached.[79] The effects achievable in this process, depending on factors including clay composition and whether any slips have been applied, can be subdued colours and tones in ranges including greys and pinks.
In the field of wood-fired ceramics, the work and aesthetics that are perhaps most different from those that concern this study result from long-duration firing in anagama kilns, where the focus is on an Oriental influenced aesthetic. As has been seen, this work grew in

78. Jeff Shapiro, 'Aesthetics of Woodfiring', *The Log Book*, issue 21, 2005, pp.10–11.
79. See *The Log Book*, issue 73, 2017, for several articles dealing with the reduction cooling process.

popularity in the West, particularly from the 1980s, and for some time seemed to dominate discourse on wood-fired ceramics. Currently there is more balanced discussion in the field, taking account of the varied approaches that constitute contemporary wood-fired ceramic practice.

The principal difference between work that embodies the quiet touch of the flame and work that has undergone a much longer firing process 'bearing evidence of the intensity of fire over many days of high temperature firing'[80] can be summarised as follows. The 'quiet' work is characterised by 'flashing' on unglazed surfaces resulting in irregular areas of colour on the clay, often in tones including orange and ochre depending on the composition of the clay body. On a previously glazed piece, the impact of flame and fly ash can contribute a richness and liveliness to the surface, and subtle variation in tone, creating a sense of depth in the glaze. Work from long duration high-temperature firing can have a very heavy irregular natural ash glaze. Depending on how and where a piece was stacked in the kiln, it can bear encrustations of ash and scars, cracks, and other signs of distortion to a limited or extreme extent.

### 2.5: The potential of specific woodfire surfaces to contribute to quietness of mood in ceramic work

Some works of art, including ceramic sculptures and vessels, have the ability to portray a quietness of mood that can be transmitted to those observing them. Here I will consider the potential of specific types of woodfire surfaces to contribute to quietness of mood in ceramic work. Art critic Peter Fuller wrote in 1983:

> The making of handmade pots matters – and not only because it is one of the most basic of all human activities; the handmade vessel exemplifies the union of man's functional skills and his aesthetic and symbolic intents. Such a union was once characteristic of all human work, but in contemporary Western society it has been tragically ruptured, and is expressed only through rare and favoured pursuits – like studio pottery.[81]

Handmade pottery, including wood-fired work, produced in the twenty-first century is not necessary in the way that the products of local traditional potters played a vital role in the

80. Coll Minogue, 'Woodfiring – An Introduction', published in *Different Stokes International Woodfire Exhibition* catalogue, The University of Iowa School of Art and Art History Ceramic Area, 1999, p. 9.
81. Peter Fuller, 'The Proper Work of the Potter', in *Images of God*, Chatto and Windus, 1983. Reprinted in *Ceramics and Society*, issue 52, 2003, pp.3–4.

past, pre-refrigeration era, for the storage and preservation of food. What then is the relevance of wood-fired work in the context of the changes that have occurred in contemporary society?

Can wood-fired ceramics be perceived as objects of contemplation in the same way as paintings or sculpture? Is their role simply as objects that have obvious character and reveal the story of their making, in stark contrast to the anonymously produced disposable products that are typical of the systems of global mass production and consumption that exist today? Are they to be viewed as objects redolent of nature, which some would argue can be increasingly important as the lives of those in developed countries become ever further removed from the rhythms and cycles of nature? Are they to be considered as records of a process in which there is a direct connection with the elemental forces of earth, air and fire? The handmade wood-fired object is arguably more than just an anachronistic gesture. It is a direct link between maker and user, an object made by hand possessing characteristics that embody the processes that it has undergone in coming into being.

As variation of surface colours and textures are integral characteristics, there is contemplative potential in wood-fired work that can engage the observer/user over time. Even a simple form such as a mug, when used every day and has become quite familiar: its weight, when empty or full, the feel of the handle, and how it fits in the hand can provide tactile engagement as well as visual – a tone, a colour, a pattern on the surface not previously noticed. How a slight deposit of ash on an area of glaze has created a subtle variation in tone – a rich blush of colour – contrasting with the surrounding area. The simple daily ritual of drinking tea or coffee can be transformed into an exercise in observation, sensory experience, and aesthetic judgement.

The same observable characteristics can be experienced when viewing wood-fired ceramics more generally, whether small pieces in domestic interiors or monumental sculptures set in a landscape. The narrative of a wood-fired vessel or sculpture can be read on its surface, regardless of whether it is a contemporary or historical piece, as clay documents its experience of its direct exposure to flame and ash during firing. There are, however, specific types of surfaces that can contribute to an overall atmosphere of quietness in wood-fired pieces, when combined with particular forms, that could be said to encourage contemplation.

The range of colours and tones that are intrinsic to wood-fired surfaces created in specific types of kilns, generally in firings of medium-length duration, can have a softness and subtlety that are conducive to quietness. When these are combined with forms that are not harsh, angular, or sharp edged, a sense of tranquillity and quietness can ensue.

Some works of art are referred to as possessing a silent quality as opposed to quietness. Much has been written on the aesthetics of silence, notably, Susan Sontag's 1969 essay of that title,[82] in which she deliberates on the subject's relevance in art. Sontag puts forth many different interpretations of artists who have achieved, or sought to achieve, silence in their work. The ultimate examples are those who have ceased working completely, thereby ceasing to communicate with an audience, and thus achieving 'silence'.

Concerning the relevance of the subject of silence as it applies within the field of ceramics, this topic was addressed by Jeffrey Jones in his article 'Keeping Quiet and Finding a Voice: Ceramics and the Art of Silence'. Jones explores different interpretations of silence as they relate to ceramics, including 'silence' in the sense of artists who did not publicly engage in discussion concerning meaning in their work. One of the areas he considers within ceramics is that of still lives, including the work of Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, which he states, 'has an eloquent silence about it, which at least in part consists of a refusal to make claims of greatness for itself or to persuade the viewer that genius is at work. […] But for all the understated, quiet nature of its existence it is still art. Silence is part of its aesthetic.'[83]

While one might consider that quietness might equate with silence in works of art, this may not necessarily be the case. Although definitions of 'quietness' and 'silence' converge in speech – both terms can mean 'the fact or state of abstaining from speech' – the terms 'quiet' and 'silent' can have quite different connotations in discussing artworks. Or can some works be both silent and quiet at the same time? Hanssen Pigott's work for example, has frequently been described as being both silent and evocative of quietness. Yet the silent aspect has most often been referenced in relation to the metaphoric power of her assemblages – trails of vessels as metaphors for lines of people waiting 'silently'.

82. Susan Sontag, 'The Aesthetics of Silence', first published in 1969. Accessed online at: www.ubu.com/aspen/aspen/5and6/index.html
83. Jeffrey Jones, 'Keeping Quiet and Finding a Voice: Ceramics and the Art of Silence', *Interpreting Ceramics*, No. 5, 2004.

What is it about some work that makes it a calming presence? That gives pleasure to the viewer on seeing, beyond merely glancing; that holds the gaze and the attention long enough to be noticed. As will be seen, the means by which the work of all the three makers in this thesis succeeds in evoking an overall sense of quietness or meditative calm beyond surface is different in each instance.

## 2.6: The aesthetics of imperfection and the elements of uncertainty and risk inherent in woodfiring

Reference to the 'aesthetics of imperfection' can immediately bring the opposite to mind – the 'aesthetics of perfection'. In his book *The Meaning of Art*, first published in 1931, the British art historian and critic Herbert Read wrote:

> Greek vases […] conform to exact geometric laws, and that is why their perfection is so cold and lifeless. There is often more vitality and more joy in an unsophisticated peasant pot. The Japanese, indeed, often deliberately mar the perfect shape which evolves naturally on the potter's wheel, because they feel that true beauty is not so regular.[84]

These opposite views of what constitutes an ideal – symmetry/asymmetry; regularity/irregularity; perfection/imperfection, are at the core of appreciation of many of the aesthetic qualities of wood-fired ceramics. In the West there was a striving for perfection in the symmetry of the Greek vases as considered by Read, which continued through to the porcelain produced at Sèvres and similar manufactories. In complete contrast is a view that appreciates the more natural and the irregular, as exemplified in much wood-fired pottery, both Eastern and Western, as well as historical and contemporary.

The concept of the 'aesthetics of imperfection' is frequently used with reference to appreciation of the pottery in the Japanese Tea Ceremony as developed in medieval Japan, beginning with 'found objects'. These simple wares for everyday use produced in traditional often rural potteries were elevated to objects of appreciation and contemplation by the tea connoisseurs or Tea Masters (see Figure 7, page 49). When such wares were first exhibited in the West there was mixed reaction. French artist potters were among the first to appreciate the innate qualities of this work. The following illustrates the sense of bafflement that it aroused in other observers:

84. Herbert Read, *The Meaning of Art* (first published 1931), Faber, 1977, p.28.

> A connoisseur's taste must have been specially educated when he consents to pay ten or twenty guineas for a water-holder that might easily be mistaken for a section of a drain-pipe, partially blackened by fire and ornamented with patches or streaks of brick-colour.[85]

Thus wrote commentator on the arts of Japan Captain F. Brinkley in 1902 about the pottery produced in Bizen from high iron bearing clays, that was held in high esteem by the Tea Masters.

Many woodfirers in the West interested in the aesthetic potential of long-duration firing in anagama-type kilns looked to Japanese precedents for guidance in matters of woodfire aesthetics. Japanese appreciation of such work, which was closely linked to respect for and sensibility to nature, had been articulated by the Tea Masters particularly with reference to the type of work produced by the potter farmers of traditional pottery areas, including Bizen and Shigaraki, during the Middle Ages, specifically during the Muromachi and Momayama periods. This perception of beauty in the irregular or the flawed, enshrined in the concepts of *wabi sabi*, as defined by the Tea Masters, relates not just to nature and natural objects, but also to manmade objects that possess these characteristics. In his chapter 'The Beauty of Irregularity' in *The Unknown Craftsman – A Japanese Insight into Beauty*, Yanagi analyses the place of the 'asymmetrical' or 'irregular' in Japanese concepts of beauty. On the aesthetic taste of the Tea Masters, he observes that 'Nothing […] was selected for use in the Tea ceremony if it was perfect and regular'.[86]

Not all woodfirers have looked to the Orient for inspiration. Some have gained inspiration from historical European pottery, including the wood-fired stoneware produced in the La Borne (see Figure 1 page 43 and Figure 9 page 53) and St Amand-en-Puisaye areas of central France, the Beauvais area of Northern France, and the Rhineland in Germany prior to the development there of the salt-glaze process (see Figure 2, page 43).[87] This work was also fired open to flame and ash effects in large single chamber horizontal kilns over several days. The difference in firing was in the length of time that the kilns were kept at higher

85. Captain F. Brinkley, *Japan: Its History, Arts and Literature*, Volume VIII, J.B. Millet Company, London, 1902. Page 332.
86. Yanagi Sōetsu, *The Unknown Craftsman – A Japanese Insight into Beauty*, adapted by Bernard Leach, Kodansha International, (first published 1972) 1978 edition, p.120.
87. Fine examples of the latter are to be seen in the paintings by the Flemish artist Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1525–1569) including *The Peasant Wedding*, 1567.

temperatures. These types of work are characterised by a quiet range of surfaces with subtle markings from flame and flyash. Where ash has melted due to heavy deposits, the effects are manifested in irregular runs or streams of green-coloured natural ash glaze.

The pots were produced in large quantities and many bear evidence of the method in which they were stacked in the kiln, one on top of the other without the use of shelves. This often resulted in dents in the forms and scars on the surfaces from where the pots were stacked so tightly that they touched off each other, and consequently were bonded together by melted ash at the points of contact. On unpacking the kiln and separation of the pieces, scar marks were the result. Other randomly occurring variables in surface tone resulted from the practice of inverting cylindrical forms over narrow-necked bottles for economy of space in packing. The top area of the latter, protected from the flame and flyash effects are consequently much paler in tone than the exposed areas. These so called 'blemishes' give these wares interest and character that is absent from later more refined and sophisticated European production wares.

While these historic/traditional European wood-fired wares have long been appreciated and have been the subject of academic research, there has not been a focus on their aesthetic attributes on anything like the level of that afforded to their Japanese equivalents. It is interesting to hypothesise as to what the outcome may have been had a group of urban aesthetes, similar to the Japanese Tea Masters, existed in Medieval Europe who 'discovered' and promoted the aesthetic qualities inherent in this type of pottery.

**The concept of Truth to Materials**

The term 'truth to materials' which had its basis in the Arts and Crafts Movement, has often been used in the context of twentieth century studio pottery, as well as in the broader fields of the applied and fine arts. By responding to and revealing the innate natural characteristics of the materials being used, the artist is being 'true' to the material. In *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (1977), Rosalind Krauss refers to Henry Moore's sculpture practice as 'a credo of "truth to Materials" – by which the organic form of the sculpted object and the organic development of the material from which it was carved would be shown to be interdependent'. Krauss quotes Moore as stating that: 'Every material has its

own individual qualities. It is only when the sculptor works direct, when there is an active relationship with his material, that the material can take its part in the shaping of an idea.'[88]

Whereas one approach to making ceramics can involve a striving for perfection, complete control over materials and a masking of their natural qualities, the concept of truth to materials is the exact opposite. The natural quality of the clays and glazes used are to be celebrated, the potter working with the materials rather than attempting to overly refine them. The concept also incorporates the acceptance of any irregularities that may occur, either in the materials themselves, or during the processes of production.

In the seminal 'Towards a Standard' chapter of *A Potter's Book*, Leach ends a list of constructional ideas that he had found useful:

> Technique is a means to an end. It is no end in itself. If the end is achieved, and a fine pot comes out of the kiln, let us not be hypercritical about fortuitous blemishes. Some of the most beautiful pots in the world are full of technical imperfections.[89]

Later in the same chapter he makes a strong case for the acceptance of irregularities 'accidentals and incidentals' that occur in the making and firing of pottery, stating that they should be viewed as 'incidental to nature rather than accidental to man'.[90]

As well as using natural unrefined materials, accessing locally sourced materials was a priority for early studio potters. It was understood that the qualities achieved in the pots they admired, including British Medieval pottery and classic Chinese wares, were due to the nature of the materials used. At the time that the pots of the Sung Dynasty were produced in China, pottery from each area was made entirely of local materials. It was the nature and combination of these limited ranges of locally occurring materials that gave the pots their unique characteristics, resulting in work that is considered timeless and possessing universal appeal.

An important influence on the spread of interest in traditional Japanese crafts, including pottery, pottery techniques, and aesthetics was the establishment of the *Mingei* Japanese

88. Rosalind E. Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, Thames & Hudson, 1977, p.143.
89. Leach, *A Potter's Book* (1973 edition), p.24.
90. Ibid., pp.24–25.

Folk Craft Movement in 1926, and its subsequent development. *Mingei* – the abbreviation of *minshūteki kōgei* – can be translated as 'art of the people'. Inspired by the Arts and Crafts Movement in Britain, it evolved as a reaction to the rapid changes that were occurring in Japanese society resulting from modernisation and industrialisation in the latter half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was also a reaction to the view that emphasised individual self-expression by artists in contrast to the preservation and continuation of traditional practices. The founders of the movement included the art critic and philosopher Yanagi Sōetsu and potters Kawai Kanjirō (1890–1966) and Hamada Shōji. Its members revered the work of the anonymous artisans of the past who had produced simple functional objects for everyday use, and strove to create quiet, unassuming pieces inspired by such traditional utilitarian work.

Truth to materials was one of the main tenets of the movement, which aimed not only to regenerate existing traditional craft practices, but also to preserve examples of the best of the folk arts from Japan, Korea and many other countries.[91] In outlining his views on materials, Yanagi stated:

> The material provided by nature is nearly always best. Nothing is more precious than the unspoiled character of raw material. For it is always richer than the man-made […] One aspect of the beauty of crafts lies in the beauty of the materials. […] Crafts are born where the necessary raw materials are found.[92]

All three potters and artists whose work is the focus of this study made use of local materials. At the time that Pleydell-Bouverie began her practice, there was still very much of a pioneering approach to finding and using appropriate materials for producing the type of work that inspired the early studio potters, namely Chinese classical pottery. She used locally occurring materials in both her clays and glazes. Jacqueline Lerat's training involved the use of clays and glaze materials from the immediate surrounding area, as had been used in the production of traditional ware for hundreds of years. Hanssen Pigott's formative training with Ivan McMeekin involved extensive prospecting for and testing of raw materials for clays and glazes.

91. Yanagi (1978 edition), p.215.
92. Ibid, p.215.

American woodfirer Jeff Shapiro, who trained in Japan and maintained a studio there for many years before returning to the USA, in writing about the aesthetics of woodfiring, stated:

> Is there a common aesthetic, a definable aesthetic that can be used for the woodfire genre at large? Perhaps not. What is it about woodfiring that is actually attractive? The surface? surely; the process? in most cases. I believe that whatever the context and environment, or whatever previous experience or preconceived ideas one brings to the table, the aesthetic of woodfiring has to do with the acceptance of a beauty that is somewhat of a parallel universe, in that it is not the conventional Western perception of classical beauty. Not a symmetrical perfect beauty…[93]

**The elements of uncertainty and risk inherent in woodfiring**

In his essay 'On the Pre-eminent Dignity of the Arts of Fire', the French poet and philosopher Paul Valéry described ceramics as the most hazardous of the arts due to its use of fire. He makes reference to the 'element of uncertainty' that is inherent in ceramics, stating that 'Risk remains the dominating and, as it were, sanctifying element'. The potter can 'never abolish Chance' in spite of 'admirable vigilance and all the foresight learned from experience, from his knowledge of heat, of its crucial stages, of the temperatures of fusion and reaction'.[94] The sentiments expressed here are probably more relevant to firing with wood than to any of the other fuels requiring less direct involvement by the potter.

Leach in giving his views on this same subject stated that:

> It must not be too readily assumed that exact scientific control necessarily yields the most beautiful results. Quite a large proportion of the most pleasing kiln effects were, in the days of manual labour, due to accidental happenings only partly under the control of the potters. The use of wood in firing has always contributed largely to such effects.[95]

Those who practice woodfiring accept that unpredictability and idiosyncrasies are intrinsic to the process, and for them, these characteristics contribute to its attraction. Achieving accurately predictable repeat results each time they fire is not generally of interest to them.

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93. Jeff Shapiro, 'Aesthetics of Woodfiring', *The Log Book*, issue 21, 2005, p.8.
94. Paul Valery, 'On the Pre-eminent Dignity of the Arts of Fire', published in *Degas Manet Morisot*, (Pantheon Books, 1960, p.170), quoted by Donald Kuspit in 'Critical Consciousness of the Arts'. http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/features/kuspit/critical-consciousness-of-the-arts-3-29-11.asp Accessed July, 2017.
95. Leach, *A Potters Book* (1973 edition), pp.179–180.

Committing work to the process of woodfiring is unlike any other method of firing ceramics in that there is arguably greater unpredictability concerning the effects achievable on the fired work. Once potters become interested in the aesthetic potential of woodfiring, and the infinite variables that can be achieved, they are likely to want to continue researching and exploring these possible effects over the long term.

In discussing the nature of craftsmanship, the wood turner David Pye (1909–1993) identified two main classifications – the workmanship of certainty, and the workmanship of risk. Of the workmanship of risk he stated: 'The essential idea is that the quality of the result is continually at risk during the process of making.' Pye was of the view that 'all the works of men which have been most admired since the beginning of history have been made by the workmanship of risk, the last three or four generations only excepted'.[96]

For many woodfirers it is the unpredictable nature of the results achieved that inspires, and indeed some consider, compels, them to continue the practice. No matter how experienced a woodfirer may be, they can never fully anticipate the fired results. While one can learn which effects can be achieved in particular areas of a kiln, and place appropriate work accordingly; use the same type of wood in each firing; follow the same stoking pattern and firing schedule as in previous firings, the end fired results can still never be fully predicted. Factors that are outside of the potters' control including prevailing weather conditions can have an impact on a firing. Complete replication of fired results is impossible. Unexpected results are often achieved, favourable or otherwise. What every woodfirer anticipates is a combination of particular effects on specific forms that they hope will be successful. It is this anticipation that continues to engage woodfirers in the process.

One could argue however that the more experienced the potter (woodfirer, or stoker) is in firing a particular kiln or type of kiln, the less risk there is involved in the outcome of a firing. When Pleydell-Bouverie had her woodfire kiln built at her workshop in Spring 1925, her experience of woodfiring at that time amounted to having observed and participated in no more than four firings of the kiln at the Leach Pottery in St Ives. As this kiln differed from her own in some respects, she was in relatively uncharted territory. The risk involved was great and it is known that she experienced many difficulties in firing the kiln in the early years of

96. David Pye, *The Nature and Art of Workmanship* (first published 1968), The Herbert Press, 1995, pp.20–21.

her practice. She wrote to Leach in December of that year: 'We've had another firing – 4 tons of wood & 78 hours. But we got the temperature & I think we've got the kiln heat now. It was an epic affair.' She described the outcome of the firing later in the same letter: 'We'd about a dozen really good pots, about 60 to 70 passable & a lot of perfectly bad and hopeless, but we really hope we've got the measure of the kiln now, for next time.'[97]

While this might seem an extraordinarily high loss rate, given that the kiln was probably capable of containing a couple of hundred pots, some woodfirers practicing today, particularly those involved in long-duration high-temperature firing, would probably identify with these statistics. Most woodfirers who have a policy of strictly editing their work post-firing, consider that the high risk in terms of loss is worth it for the successful pieces that come from each firing. That is, those that really satisfy them, and that they consider make the effort involved in every stage of the process worthwhile.

Woodfiring can have an impact beyond surface in that forms can be distorted slightly or significantly. This aspect of the process, adding to the element of uncertainty and risk in the fired outcome, is an additional attraction for many woodfire practitioners. Pleased with the gentle oval shapes of her porcelain bowls that resulted from the slight warping that occurred in her woodfirings, Hanssen Pigott also engaged in a process of deliberately distorting the shapes prior to firing, to accentuate this effect. Although most of the stages in producing her assemblages were precisely planned, including their post-firing arrangement, she none-the-less welcomed the uncertainty of the outcome of the process of woodfiring, both in terms of the impact of the additional ash on her meticulously applied glazes, and the generally very subtle distortion of the thinly thrown open topped vessels – bowls and beakers.

Towards the end of her career Pleydell-Bouverie reflecting on her earlier practice stated:

> I imagine that the great thing about potting – for those of us who work on the wheel, is that one works with things that are alive. The clay comes to life as the pot grows:

97. Letter from Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie to Bernard Leach, 13th Dec. 1925, in The Leach Archive, Crafts Study Centre, Farnham, Surrey (henceforth LA/CSC), (LA2418).

> the fire […] is always alive. So the element of chance; in a sense the element of adventure, is always present.[98]

In her poetical and evocative account of the firing that she carried out in her kiln on 25th of November 2006, Jacqueline Lerat described how 'The waiting begins, the encounter [the firing] keeps its share of the unknown. We know and we do not know. We accept the uncertainty, the unforeseen, the part of the fire'.[99]

From the writings of all three potters and artists, it is evident that they welcomed the uncertainty that woodfiring brought, and the unforeseeable attributes that it contributed to their work.

### 2.7: Defining woodfiring and wood-fired ceramics as a specialist area within the field of ceramics by process, and the question of whether the aesthetics of wood-fired ceramics are process driven

Woodfiring is one of many specialist areas in the ever-expanding possibilities for the production of ceramics, as innovative technology is used in developing new methods of production and design.[100] The development of woodfiring as a specialist area within contemporary pottery occurred during the increase in the popularity of the crafts in general in the 1970s. Salt glaze, which, like woodfiring was a historical and traditional firing process, similarly emerged as an area of specialisation. While salt glazing, and the similar technique of soda glazing continue to be practiced by studio potters worldwide, they have not been the subjects of as much interest as woodfiring.

It was noted earlier that many specialist conferences and symposia, and numerous other specialist events focussed on woodfiring have taken place since 1983. These have contributed to the furtherance of what is now regarded by some commentators as the 'woodfire movement'. Owen Rye has stated:

98. Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, 'A Chance Account', in *Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie*, Crafts Study Centre, 1980 (henceforth 'CSC 1980'), p.17.
99. Jacqueline Lerat, 'Four Sèvres Kiln Log', *The Log Book*, issue 75, 2018, p10. English translation (by Coll Minogue) of 'Four Sèvres', by Jacqueline Lerat, published in French in *Paroles de Feu – les Fours à Bois en France*, Musée Bernard Palissy, 2000.
100. 3D printing and computer aided design (CAD), for example.

> It is clear that there is now a collective entity which we can call the 'contemporary woodfire movement'. The artists involved would agree that they belong to a large grouping with common interests. Conferences, collaborations, workshops, publications and exhibitions (group and individual) around the world under the rubric of 'woodfire' confirm that. The woodfire movement worldwide continues to grow.[101]

But do the factors listed here constitute a 'movement' within the field of ceramics? According to one dictionary definition a movement is 'an organization, association or group, especially one that promotes a particular cause'.[102] Based on this definition, a woodfire movement would certainly appear to be in existence.

Louise Allison Cort in the final paragraph of her essay 'A Short History of Woodfiring in America' noted how 'The woodfiring movement in America (an integral part of the international movement) is just hitting its stride, and there is much to look forward to.' We have seen that contemporary woodfiring encompasses a broad range of work, methodologies and associated aesthetics So, if it is accepted that a movement does in fact exist, is it defined simply by the process of woodfiring, or in some other way?

There is a view that the field of wood-fired ceramics should not be defined by process, and a criticism that is often levelled at woodfirers is that they focus too much on the technical aspects of their practice. When explaining their work painters rarely, if ever, place emphasis on the type of paint they use or the manner of its application, or sculptors the methods they use to carve or cast their work, though it would appear that many printmakers, for example, revel in process.

Some woodfire potters are of the opinion that woodfiring should be considered as just another process, not singled out for any special attention or explanation, that wood-fired work should be judged like all other ceramics and art – on merit alone – without becoming involved in discussions of process, how the work was made and particular effects achieved. American woodfire potter Rob Barnard, who was one of the first woodfirers to raise such concerns in his published writing, has argued that:

101. Rye, 2011, p.60.
102. *Chambers 21st Century Dictionary*.

> An effect can only be thought of as successful when it has been physically and intellectually integrated to the point that a person is almost entirely unaware of it when viewing a piece, in much the same way he/she is unaware of the vocabulary of a remarkable novel. It is not the vocabulary of a novel that makes it important or significant, but how the writer makes use of words to illuminate the human condition. The unfamiliar and peculiar effects of fused ash, brightly colored scorch marks and distorted form (which can be thought of as part of the vocabulary of wood firing) should only be considered a means the ceramist uses to develop a personal language.[103]

Barnard's concern was that by focusing too much attention on the process, woodfirers were in danger of failing to progress beyond that, to reach a stage where they could 'exploit this archaic vocabulary to communicate contemporary concerns'. An opposite view might argue that, as in some fields of contemporary art, process should be seen as an intrinsic part of aesthetic theory in the appreciation and understanding of wood-fired work.

In the methods of working that some woodfirers have employed in the past, and which are again being used by a growing number of contemporary practitioners, the wood-fired pot as a result of the process through which it comes into being can be regarded as a natural object. It is made of a natural raw material – clay, with little or no refinement. The process of firing using wood – a natural plant material – can be seen as a natural process. The randomness of the results achieved also has echoes in nature and comparisons with natural objects are often made in describing wood-fired work.

In his overview to the series of books published by Ashgate under the title *The Histories of Material Culture and Collecting, 1700–1950,* Michael Yonan states: 'The human relationship to objects has proven a rich field of scholarly inquiry, with much recent scholarship either anthropological or sociological rather than art historical in perspective.' One of the concerns of the series is 'the role of objects in defining self, community, and difference in an increasingly international and globalised world, with cross-cultural exchange and travel the central modes of object transfer'.[104] The questions of how and why wood-fired work appeals to certain people have been the subject of some analysis in recent times, but not as much as one might expect given its popularity worldwide. No matter how attractive the process

103. Rob Barnard, 'Beyond the Process', *Ceramics Monthly*, October 1986, pp.36–37.

104. Quotes are from the series overview as published in the volume *Potters and Patrons in Edo Period Japan Takatori Ware and the Kuroda Domain*, by Andrew L. Maske, Ashgate, 2011, (unpaginated, page opposite title page).

of woodfiring may be to practitioners, it is unlikely that so many would want to become involved in it, if some people did not wish to acquire the finished work. This leads to the question of what it is about wood-fired work that makes people want to use and collect it.

Possible answers to this question can perhaps be found in examining the characteristics of the work, some of which are common to many handmade craft objects, while others are unique to wood-fired pieces. An important consideration in the collecting and use of handmade objects is the potential for a direct connection between maker and user or maker and observer. In an essay 'Surface as Practice' in which she discusses the significance of the tactile experience of the surfaces of craft objects, maker and academic Lesley Millar states: 'As we handle the work, our touch and the touch of the maker conjoin and become one, no matter how ancient the object and its surface.'[105] The handmade object provides a means of connection between two people. The user can learn something of the maker through experience of the object made by them, regardless of when it may have been made.

Comparison is sometimes made between the surfaces of wood-fired objects and those of archaeological artefacts. Some wood-fired surfaces, particularly those of pots that have been fired for several days and are heavily encrusted with ash, can bring to mind ancient objects that have been buried in earth for long periods of time. This aspect could be regarded as an attractive feature of such work.

In the same way that the passage of time and use over time are registered on the surfaces of objects by their patina, similarly the effects resulting from the period of time that wood-fired pieces are in a kiln during firing, and the atmospheric and other changes that they undergo whilst there, are registered on their surfaces. The effects of firing can also alter the form of the work, to a greater or lesser extent. Part of the attraction for the user/collector undoubtedly comes from the knowledge that they are in possession of a unique work, which can never be completely replicated, even by the artist who made it.

105. Lesley Millar, 'Surface as Practice', in *Surface Tensions – Surface, Finish and the Meaning of Objects*, Edited by Glenn Adamson and Victoria Kelley, Manchester University Press, 2013, p.28.

Collectors of ceramics are often eager to learn of the processes involved in the creation of work. It would appear that such knowledge adds to their appreciation. Having the opportunity of meeting the artist and learning from them about the ideas that inspired the work, how it was made and fired are important aspects to be considered in the selling of wood-fired work. The wood-fired pot, vessel, or sculpture communicates with the observer/user. While knowledge of the process of woodfiring is not necessarily a prerequisite to facilitate the reading of a wood-fired surface, gaining an understanding of it and all that it entails, including its historical dimension, seems to encourage further collecting by those who are initially attracted to the work by its appearance alone. Learning how specific effects were achieved during firing adds to the satisfaction of owning such work.

Given that the firing is vital to the permanence of the finished work, woodfirers welcome the opportunity of being actively and creatively involved in this most important stage of the ceramic process, and thus directly influencing the outcome. Kilns fired with gas, oil, or electricity provide fewer opportunities for active intervention in the process of firing. With regard to firing with electricity in particular, the potter is generally completely distanced from the firing process and has no active involvement, other than the flicking of a switch or the re-setting of a computerised programme.

In most methods of woodfiring the emphasis is not necessarily on efficiency – on reaching temperature as quickly as possible and using as little fuel as possible. In this sense it is the effects that are sought by the potter that dictate the type of kiln to be built/used and the length of firing, rather than purely economic considerations. Anticipation of the aesthetic outcome is the dominant consideration. This aspect of the practice places woodfiring at odds with the belief system that prevails, not only in the ceramics industry but is also held by many individual potters, of efficiency and reduction of fuel costs as primary aims.

In industrial production and firing in electric kilns, and to a slightly lesser extent firings in oil and gas-fired kilns, the temperature tends to be even throughout the ware chamber. This is frequently not the case in woodfire kilns, and consideration must be given to placing different types of clay or glazes according to the temperatures that are likely to be achieved in particular areas. These factors have a determining effect regarding the work that should

be placed in these areas. Thus woodfiring in a specific kiln can have an impact on these aspects of the creative process and, by extension the aesthetics of the work produced.

Discussing the difference between firing for efficiency and for aesthetics, American woodfirer Jeff Shapiro explained:

> Some of the best woodfirings I have had were the ones that were the most difficult. This is not an emotional response. But rather there is a very simple explanation. The interesting effects occur due to fluctuations in the atmosphere as well as rising and dropping of temperature. This builds subtle layers on the surface of the fired clay. A straight climb in temperature would be an efficient way of firing but it would also create a very mediocre palette of colour and texture.[106]

As the process of firing evolves, decisions are made by the potter/firer that directly influence the appearance of the finished work. The results of the firing have an impact on subsequent firings, and on the type of work to be made for them, in anticipation of achieving similar or improved results based on how the firing was conducted and how, in consequence the results unfolded. Firing results and effects achieved are a potent source of inspiration for future work, both in the forms to be made, and also the position in the kiln where the work is to be stacked, and how it is to be packed in relation to other forms. All of these considerations have an impact on future creative judgements and subsequent aesthetic outcomes.

In the context of woodfiring, the potter has expectations for the outcome and consequently the effect on the work. But during the actual process of firing it is necessary to concentrate on the here and now, making practical decisions in relation to the management of the firing. While thoughts of possible methods of experimentation in future firings may be entertained during firing, they have to be held in abeyance until after the kiln has been unpacked and the results assessed. Only then will more information become available to be used as a basis for making decisions about future firings and work.

Thus it is the results obtained in each firing that provide the inspiration and impetus for the next firing. Even when a firing is seen as having been largely unsuccessful, and the post-firing editing of work, whether immediate and impetuous, or more considered on reflection

106. Jeff Shapiro, 'Aesthetics of Woodfiring', *The Log Book*, issue 21, 2005, pp.9–10.

over a period of time results in the decision to destroy a large proportion of the work, it is possible that an effect achieved, even on just one small area of the surface of one pot or sculptural form, can have the potential to inspire a new cycle of making for the next firing, in anticipation of achieving this pleasing effect more widely. Wood-fired ceramics can in these respects be considered a process driven aesthetic.

In discussing this aspect of firing, woodfire potter Robert Sanderson stated: 'It is this random yet deliberate mark of the fire that attracts me. The way the kiln is stacked, the space left between the pots is as important as the shape of the pots themselves.'[107] In anticipating and directing the path of the flame through the kiln the potter can, to a certain extent, predict some of the effects that may be achieved on the fired work. Sanderson continued:

> Sitting inside the chamber after it has been unpacked, remembering the results of the firing, visualising the passage of the flame, seeing the melted ash glaze on the brickwork, has been for me the only way to try and understand the kiln. To take advantage of its innate qualities. To make improvements.

## 2.8: Woodfiring and wood-fired ceramics within some broader contexts

In considering woodfiring and wood-fired ceramics in some broader contexts there are certain areas of practice that seem particularly appropriate for comparison. In the field of craft, considering other areas of specialisation where changes may occur after a form has been made, a comparison can be drawn with the complete turning of a form in green wood, which distorts and alters naturally as it dries. This is a different approach from that where a form is first rough turned, allowed to season, and then the turning completed, in a process that prevents distortion.

In *The Unknown Craftsman* Yanagi describes observing a traditional Korean wood turner turning green wood, and his subsequent understanding of 'the asymmetrical nature of Korean lathe work'.[108] The wet turning process has been used to great advantage by several contemporary wood turners. Wheel-thrown pottery forms, which can be perfectly symmetrical when packed in a woodfire kiln can likewise distort during the process of firing. In both circumstances naturally occurring distortion takes place. The maker has no control

107. Robert Sanderson, 'From the Heart', in *Woodfire '89* conference proceedings, p.122. Also published in *Pottery in Australia*, Vol. 28, No. 3, 1989, p.49.
108. Yanagi, 1978 edition, p.122.

over this arbitrary alteration of form, and in both processes the results can be considered successful or not, depending on the manner and extent to which distortion may occur and whether it fits with the maker's aesthetic preferences.

Within the wider field of art reference has been made to the similarities between the Abstract Expressionist movement and the woodfiring of ceramics. In the seemingly arbitrary nature of the effects achievable in woodfiring – the element of chance – some commentators see a similarity with the methods and processes used by the artists of the Abstract Expressionist movement. As processes that are not controlled or fully predictable by the artist one could perhaps identify common characteristics in both. In an article 'The New Ceramic Presence' published in 1961 in *Craft Horizons* magazine, of which she was then editor, Rose Slivka stated:

> More than in any other form of art, there is a tradition of the 'accident' in ceramics – the unpremeditated, fortuitous event that may take place out of the potter's control, in the interaction between the living forces of clay and fire that may exercise mysterious wills of their own. The fact that the validity of 'the accident' is a conscious precept in modern painting and sculpture is a vital link between the practice of pottery and the fine arts today.'[109]

Slivka's essay referred to the work being produced by Peter Voulkos and those influenced by his teaching at the Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles, California, which would come to be known as 'Abstract Expressionist Ceramics'. This was the title of an exhibition with accompanying catalogue curated by John Coplans, shown at the University of California Art Galleries in Irvine in 1966, focussing on the work of Voulkos and nine of his colleagues, which was created between 1954 and 1965.

Coplans stated in the exhibition catalogue that 'The task these ceramicists set themselves was to rediscover the essential character of the medium […] free […] of all dogma and convention'.[110] The work that this group created was unlike any previously produced in the field of pottery or sculpture and has been described as a 'revolution in clay'. Its impact, which completely changed the perception of ceramics, spread rapidly, not only in the USA but much further afield, and continues to be widely influential today.

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109. Rose Slivka, 'The New Ceramic Presence', *Craft Horizons* (the magazine of the American Craftsmen's Council), Vol. 21, No. 4, July / August 1961, p.33.
110. John Coplans, *Abstract Expressionist Ceramics*, University of California, Irvine, 1966, p.12.

The essence of this new style of ceramics was that it broke away from the notion of the functional and instated clay as a medium of expression. Much of the work was large in scale and created in a spontaneous improvisational manner, embracing the unexpected and accepting the accidental.[111] Shown in major exhibitions and galleries the work of the group established ceramics as an art form to be considered alongside, and comparable to, painting and sculpture.

While this work pre-dated Voulkos' involvement in woodfiring by some two decades, it could be said that the aspects of the process that attracted him were an extension of those that he used in creating his clay vessels and sculptures. Much was left to chance in how the work developed in both circumstances.

Voulkos began his career making functional work inspired by the studio pottery movement, before he became famous for his abstract sculptural forms that crossed the traditional dividing line between 'craft' ceramics and fine art. Before he began to have his work wood-fired, he was inspired by Japanese ceramics from different periods, including the well-known wood-fired work produced at the six ancient kiln sites in the medieval period.

The critic Garth Clark noted that Voulkos' *Gash* (1978) had 'been gas-fired and glazed with a commercial glaze meant to imitate woodfire'.[112] From 1979 and continuing for some two decades, Voulkos' work was wood-fired by Peter Callas,[113] who had approached him at an exhibition of his (Voulkos') work, and said that he could 'fire anything he made and make it more beautiful'.[114] Discussing Voulkos' wood-fired work in relation to Abstract Expressionism, Callas stated that:

> Voulkos' character was energised by woodfire, and he viewed it as a momentous home run. The shoe fit perfectly when we melded the intuitive ideologies of Abstract Expressionism with the dynamic qualities of the anagama kiln. […] It was an enticing challenge for Pete to let go of complete control […] He related to the wood fire's

111. Mary Davis MacNaughton, 'Innovation in Clay: The Otis Era 1954–1960', *Revolution in Clay The Marer Collection of Contemporary Ceramics*, University of Washington Press, 1994, p.55.
112. http://www.cowanauctions.com/auctions/item.aspx?ItemId=89273 Accessed March 2011. The work in question sold at auction for a record price in 2011.
113. Peter Callas, 'Woodfiring: The Ash Wonder of the World', *Studio Potter*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 1982, pp.12–14.
114. Peter Callas, 'Woodfiring: Historical Obligation or Fashionable Fire', paper presented at the 2nd Foshan International Woodfire Conference (Foshan, China, 2007) and reprinted in *The Log Book*, issue 31, 2007, p.14.

> abstract nuances […] So the relationship of wood fire and Abstract Expressionism was that we just stretched the parameters of both.[115]

For Voulkos, process and experience were of prime importance in creating his work. There was emphasis on the directness of these processes – and the energy of the experience, not just on the finished work (see Figure 8, page 51). It has been argued that in common with some of his contemporaries involved in other artistic endeavours whom he met whilst teaching at Black Mountain College in North Carolina in 1953, including John Cage and Merce Cunningham, Voulkos 'valued the process of creating art more than the finished object'.[116]

In the fields of painting and sculpture 'Process became a widespread preoccupation of artists in the late 1960s and the 1970s, but like so much else can be tracked back to the Abstract Expressionist paintings of Jackson Pollock.'[117] An aspect of Process Art was that the process or processes used in creating the work of art became part of it. There was no attempt to hide the making process or the properties of the materials used, which were acknowledged as features of the finished work. The movement was also characterised by the use of non-traditional materials in making. Improvisation, random occurrences were part of the creative process.

In her book *All About Process – The Theory and Discourse of Modern Artistic Labor*, Kim Grant analyses the concept of the artistic process rather than the artwork as the main concern in different contexts in both historical and contemporary art practice.[118] Grant compares the view that places emphasis on process with approaches that have dominated discourse in art in the twentieth century, including Formalism – where the entire focus is on the artwork with no consideration of process, and Conceptual Art – where the idea is elevated over any aspect of making.[119] Perhaps it is in reaction to this situation that process has become such an important consideration, not only for contemporary artists but also for their audiences.

115. Joe Campbell, an interview with Peter Callas, published in *Clay Times*, May/June 2009, pp.33–36.
116. Collette Chattopadhyay, 'Peter Voulkos: Clay, Space, and Time', *Sculpture* magazine, Vol.20, No.2, March 2001.
117. http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/p/process-art (accessed 13/6/18)
118. Kim Grant, *All About Process – The Theory and Discourse of Modern Artistic Labor*, Penn State University Press, 2017.
119. Grant, 2017.

The technique of woodfiring, as a distinct means of firing pottery that contributes unique surfaces and other characteristics to the fired work, could be said to be in accordance with the tenets of Process Art, in that the means or process of how the work has been transformed into its final form is clearly visible and can be read on the finished work.

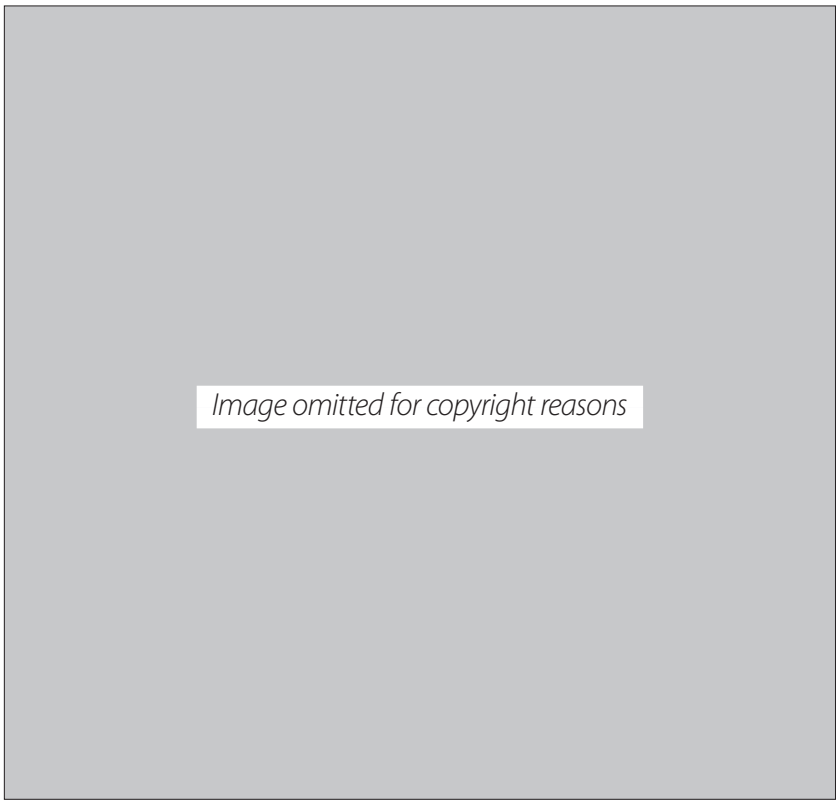
## 2.9: Conclusion

This chapter has examined the subject of high temperature woodfiring and wood-fired ceramics which grew in popularity throughout the twentieth century, from a range of perspectives and in different contexts. It has been seen that woodfiring was practiced by potters throughout the century and continues today, with a broad range of aesthetic aims and outcomes. There has been particular reference to two practices – long-duration firing in large kilns primarily with the aim of achieving specific effects on raw clay surfaces, and the exploration of more subtle and quiet effects generally achieved in shorter firing cycles, in smaller sized kilns.

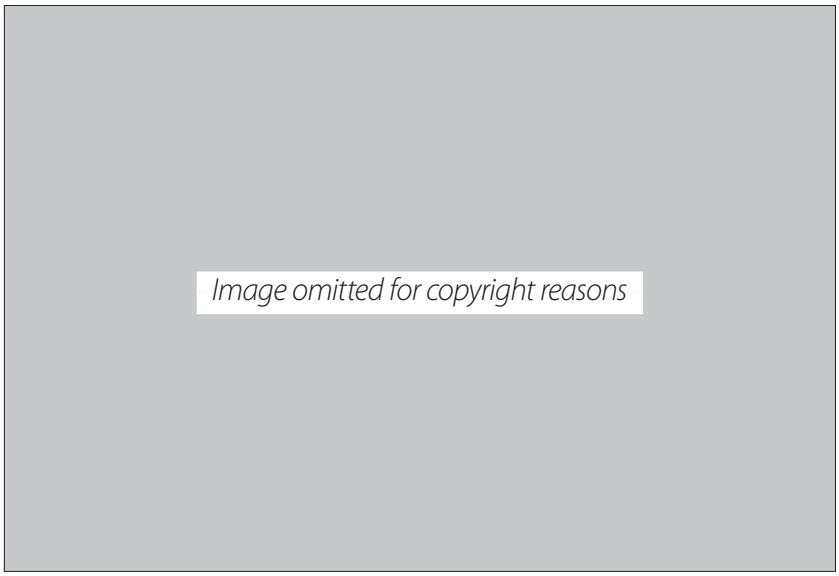
Some of the characteristics of the process are common to both styles of woodfiring, while others are specific to one or other. Despite the fact that long-duration firing seemed to dominate the discourse on woodfiring in the latter quarter of the century, other methods of firing continued throughout this period, as they had since the earliest days of the studio pottery movement.

This chapter has served as an introduction to the individual approaches to woodfiring practiced by the three potters/artists whose work is the focus of this thesis. These approaches resulted in quiet surface qualities contributing to an overall quietness of mood in their work. While they used different types of kilns, materials and processes, the work of each is expressive of the Quiet Touch of the Flame. It had qualities bestowed on it by woodfiring that were completely appropriate to it, and that could not have been achieved by any other means.

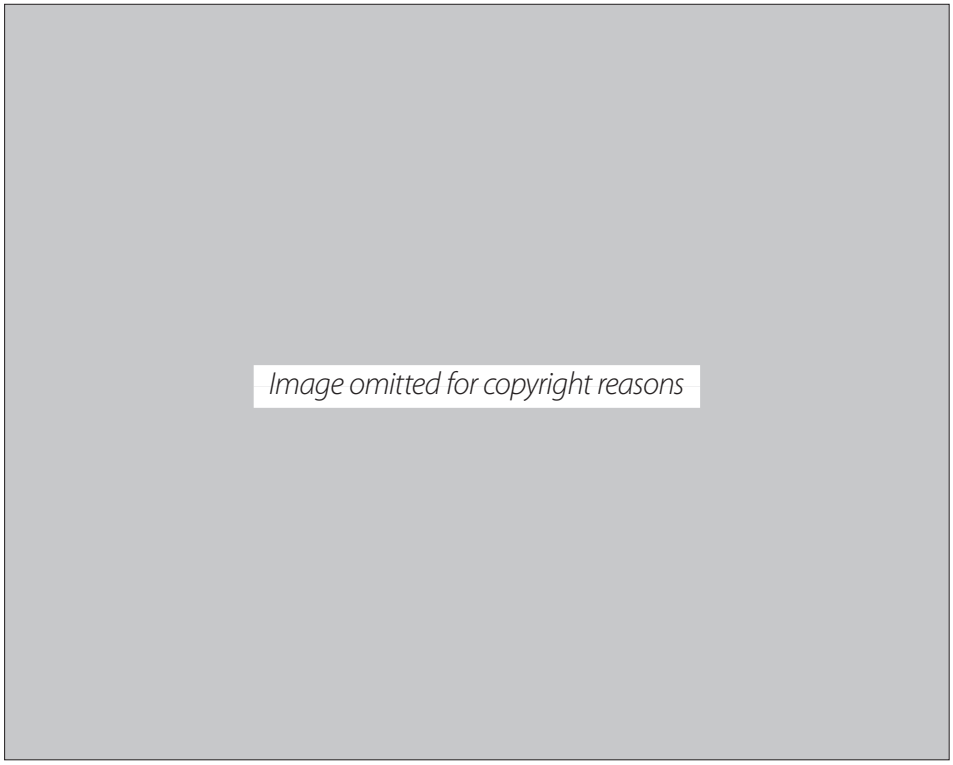
# Chapter 2
# Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie



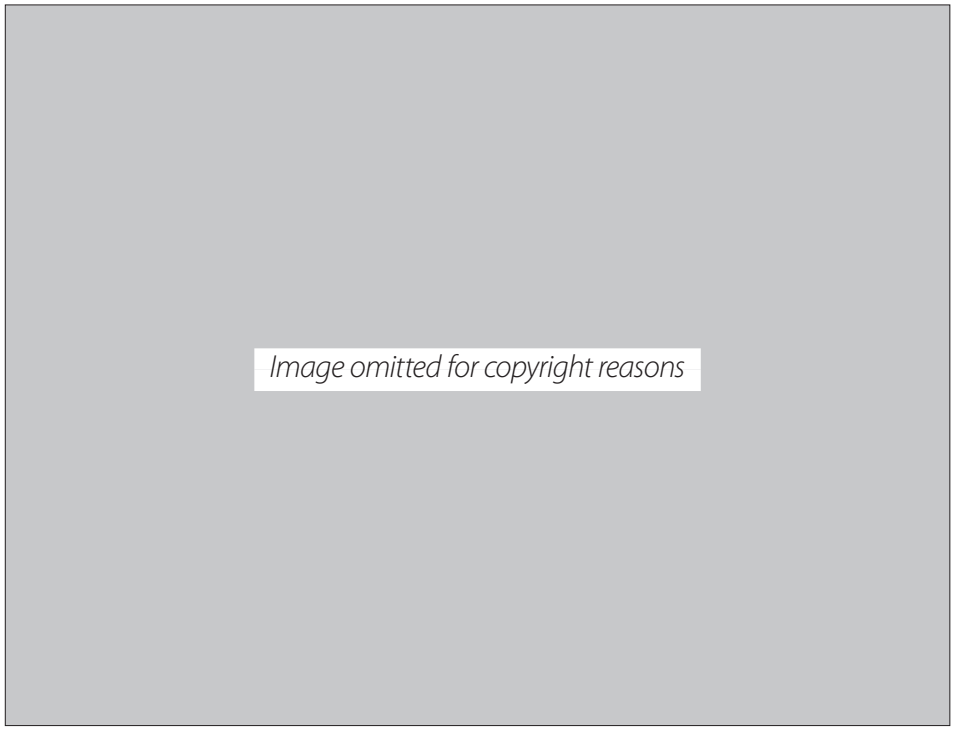

**10.** Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, throwing in her studio, Coleshill, Berkshire (now in Wiltshire) UK, 1926–1939. (Image source: *The Crafts in Britain in the 20th Century*, by Tanya Harrod, Yale University Press, 1999.)



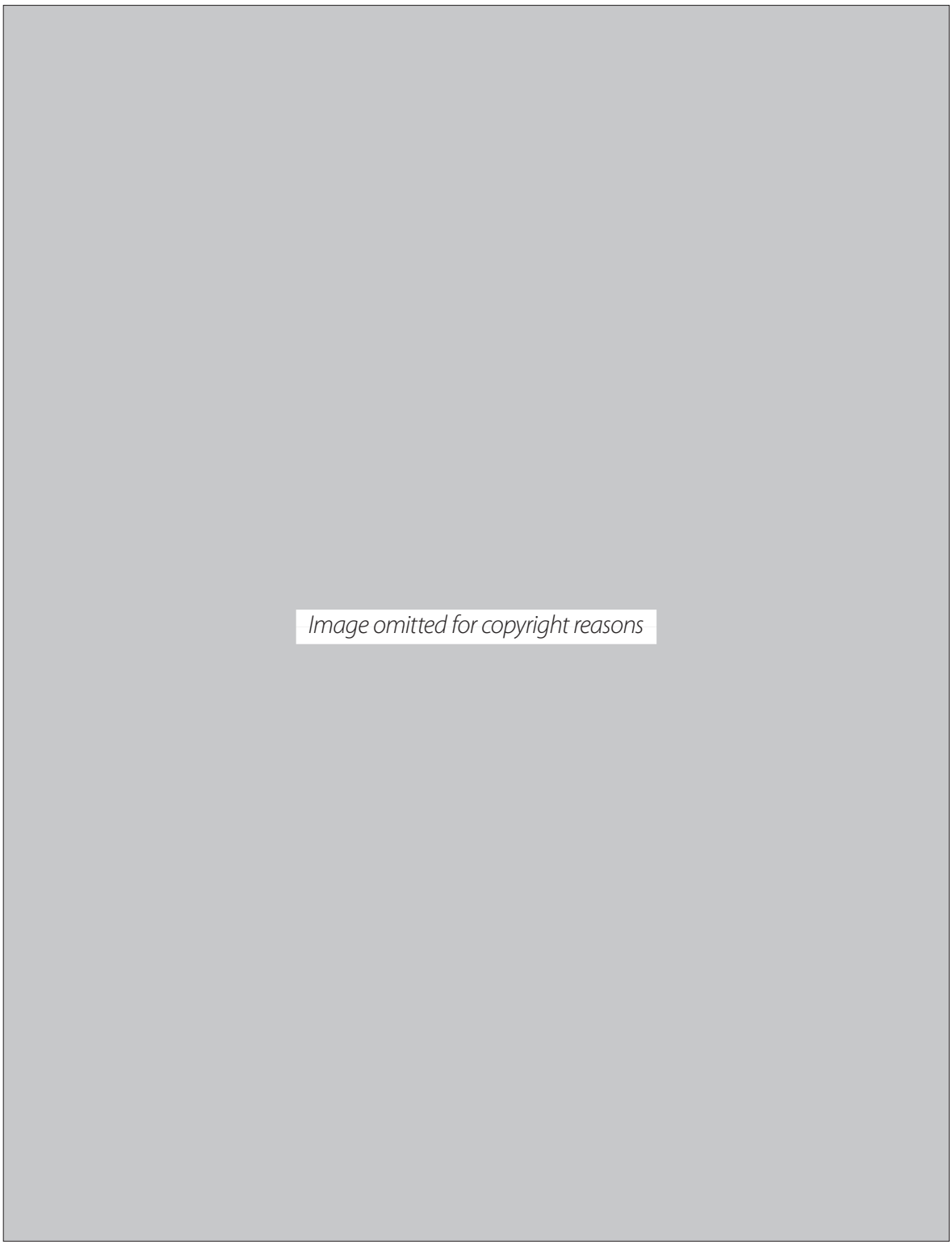

**11.** *Bowl*, by Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, stoneware, crackled ash glaze, 10cm diam., c.1935. Made at Coleshill. (Image source: *British Studio Ceramics*, by Paul Rice, Crowood Press, 2002.)



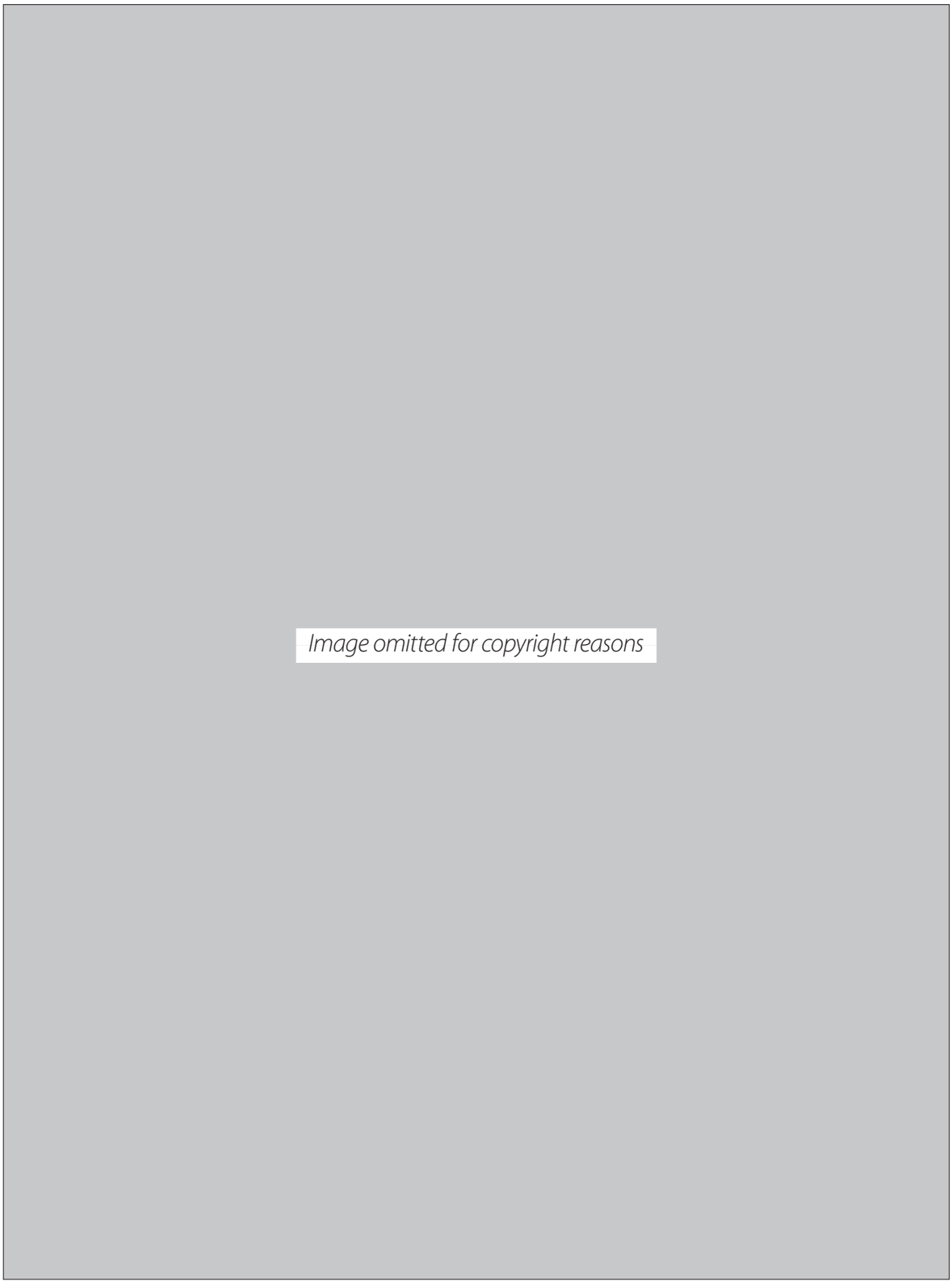

**12.** *Bowl*, by Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, 1937–38, 10.15cm in height. Stoneware with rose ash glaze. (Image source: *Things of Beauty Growing British Studio Pottery*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2017.)



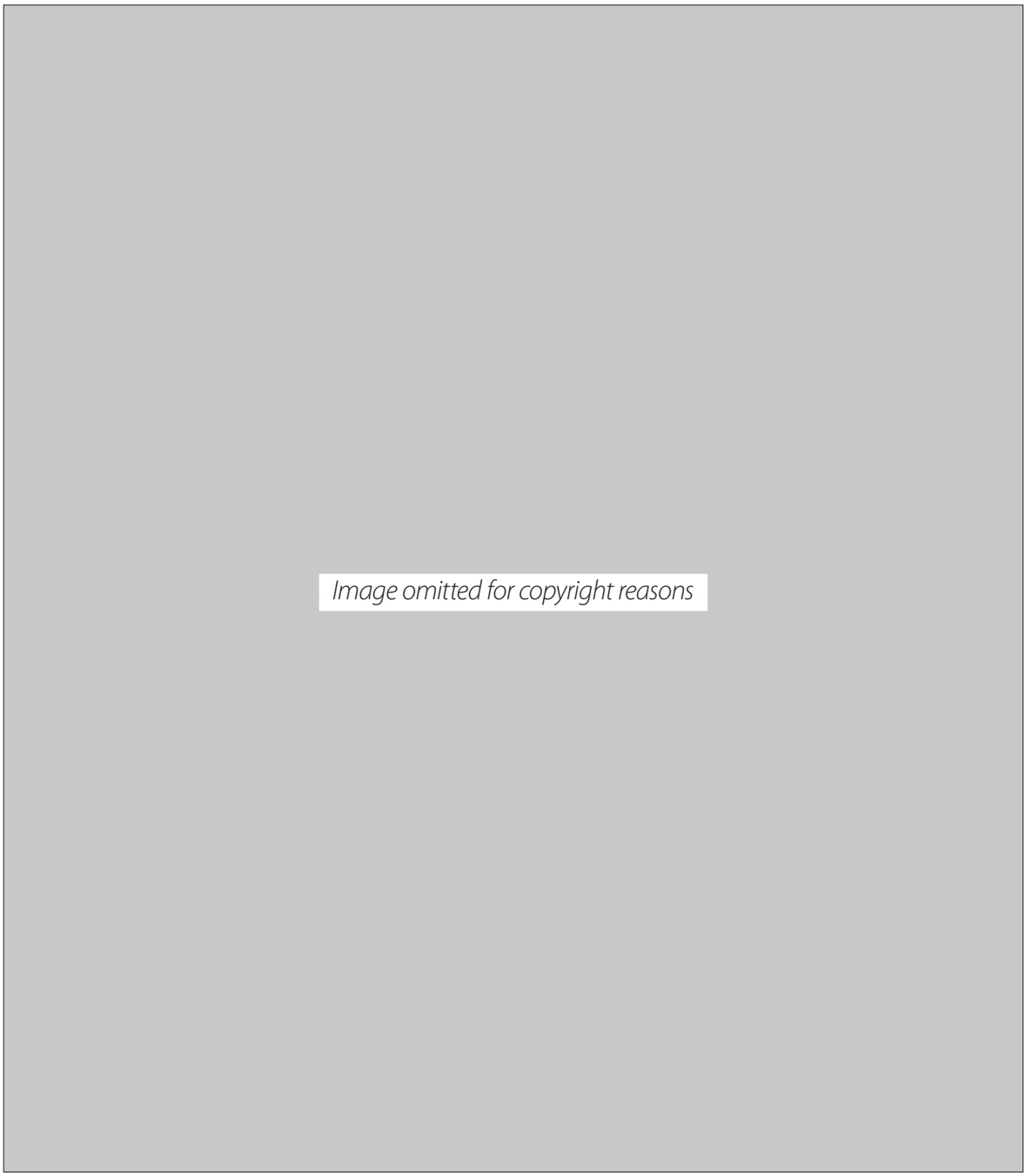

**13.** *Bowl*, by Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, 1935, 7cm in height. Stoneware, thorn ash glaze. (Image source: *Things of Beauty Growing British Studio Pottery*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2017.)



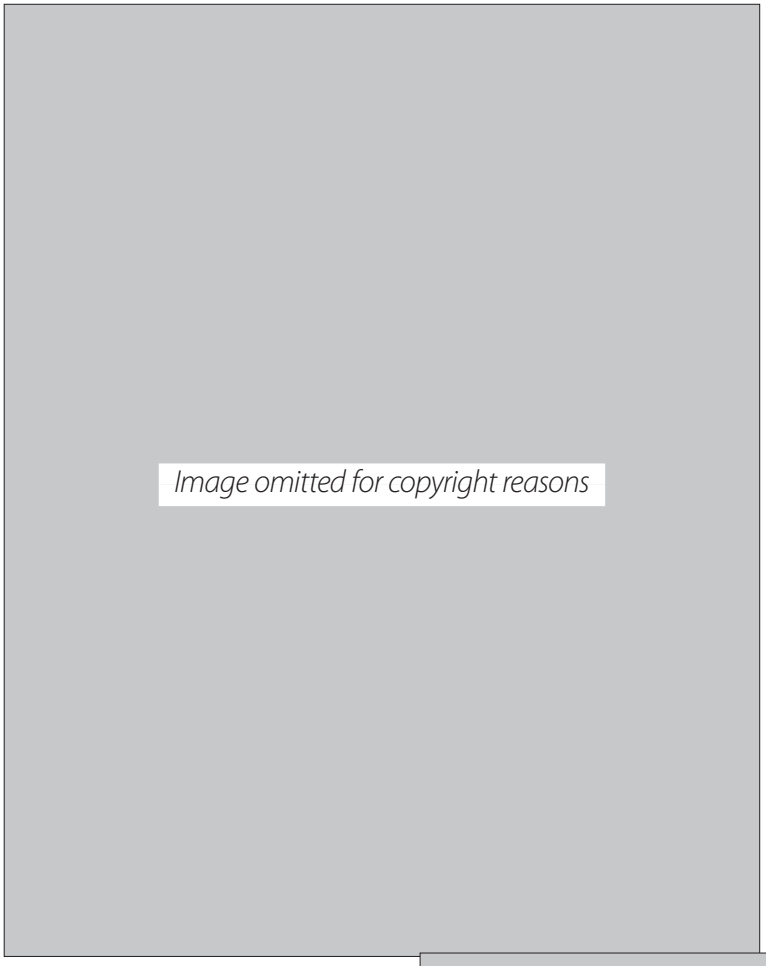

**14.** *Roc's Egg*, by Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, 1929–1930, 25.4cm in height. Stoneware, wood-ash glaze. Bought from the potter in 1930, for £5.25. (Image source: *Studio Pottery: Twentieth Century British Ceramics in the Victoria and Albert Museum Collection*, by Oliver Watson, Phaidon Press in association with the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1990.)



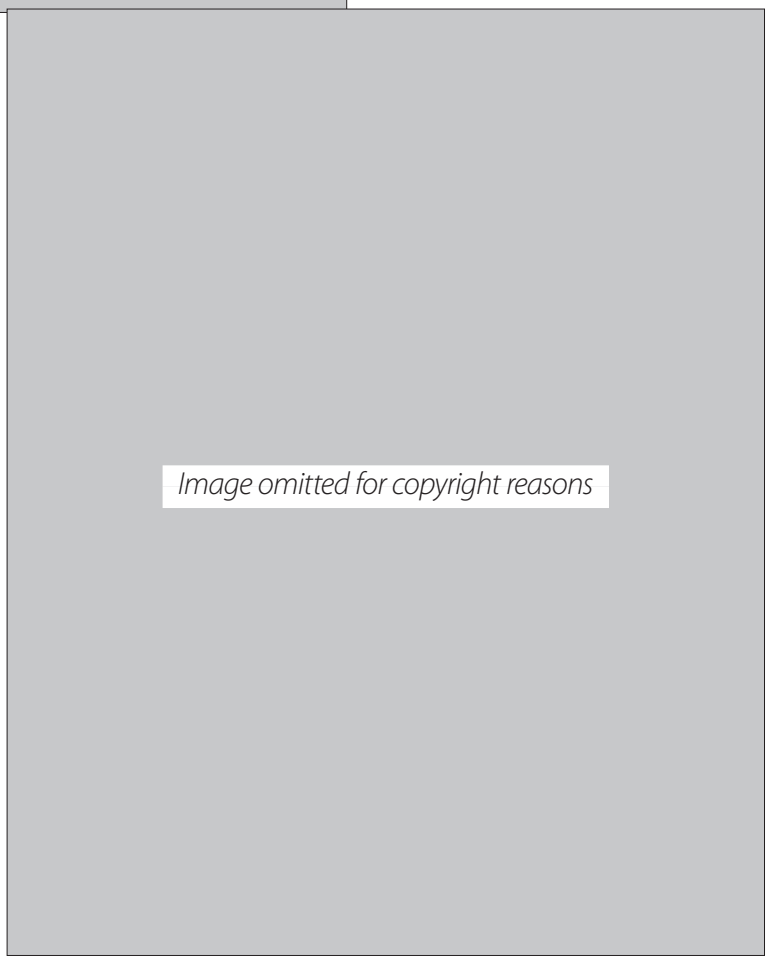

**15.** *Vase*, by Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, pre-1936, 27.5cm in height. The Wingfield Digby Collection.
(Image source: *Bernard Leach, Hamada & their Circle from the Wingfield Digby Collection*, by Tony Birks and Cornelia Wingfield Digby, Phaidon Christie's, 1990.)




**16.** *Two Small Bottles*, by Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, pre-1939, 16cm and 12.5cm in height. The Wingfield Digby Collection. Both pieces were kept by Katherine Pleydell-Bouverie at Kilmington, Wiltshire, and bought by the Wingfield Digbys at the Kilmington Manor sale in 1985. (Image source: *Bernard Leach, Hamada & their Circle from the Wingfield Digby Collection*, by Tony Birks and Cornelia Wingfield Digby, Phaidon Christie's, 1990.)




**17.** *Vase*, by Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, stoneware, ash glaze, 31cm in height, c.1926. (Image source: *British Studio Ceramics*, by Paul Rice, Crowood Press, 2002.)




**18.** *Vase*, by Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, 1937, 34.3cm in height. Stoneware with grey box ash glaze, annd brown iron splash. (Image source: *Things of Beauty Growing British Studio Pottery*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2017.)

## Chapter 3: Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie

### Introduction – chapter overview

Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie's was primarily inspired by the aesthetics of Chinese Sung Dynasty pottery. Her methods were based on her training at Leach's pottery in St Ives. Leach had trained in Japan and was influenced by Japanese pottery processes. He had established the pottery in partnership with Hamada, who had also trained in his native Japan. But Pleydell-Bouverie did not set out to make pots like either Leach's or Hamada's. In establishing an area of specialisation early in her career she took a different direction, one that had not previously been taken by any other potter in Britain working within the studio pottery movement. The quality and range of her ash glazes were a significant factor in her work and undoubtedly contributed to its success. When the particular qualities of her glazes were combined with strong forms inspired by classic Chinese models, the result was a body of work that has stood the test of time, and is currently the subject of renewed interest by academics and researchers.

The work that is generally regarded as being the most significant and successful of Pleydell-Bouverie's long career was produced in the fourteen years after she established her first workshop in 1925. She remained active as a maker for some forty years in the new workshop to which she moved following the Second World War. Yet as Cardew pointed out: 'The epic days of her wood-fired stoneware now belong to the past, but their place in the history of English pottery is secure.'[1]

### 3.1: Biographical narrative as context for Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie's work

Katharine Harriot Duncombe Pleydell-Bouverie was born into a British aristocratic family in 1895, the youngest of three children of Duncombe Pleydell-Bouverie, son of the 4th Earl of Radnor, and his wife. The family home was the palatial Coleshill House in Berkshire, built in 1650–62.[2] The estate also included the village of Coleshill and the surrounding farms and woodland. Pleydell-Bouverie was referred to by her family as 'Bina', but was later known to her friends as 'Beano'.

1. Cardew, 'St. Ives and Coleshill Days', CSC 1980, p.13.
2. In his biography Cardew describes Coleshill as 'a proud and perfect house built in the Palladian style and conceived on a palatial scale', *A Pioneer Potter* (first published 1988), 1989 edition, p.77.

The death of her brother at the age of 28 in the First World War in 1915 was to dramatically change Pleydell-Bouverie's life. Her sister joined the Voluntary Aid Detachment the following year, and Pleydell-Bouverie subsequently went to France with four friends to serve in the British Committee of the French Red Cross, working in hospital canteens.[3]

As Alison Light emphasises in *Forever England* the inter-war period was a time of relative repression for women.[4] Yet, as Light points out, such a view of women's experience is difficult to reconcile 'with the buoyant sense of excitement and release which animates so many of the more broadly cultural activities which different groups of women enjoyed in the period'.

In her book *A Woman's Touch – Women in Design from 1860 to the Present Day*, Isabelle Anscombe makes the point that many middle-class women 'found it exciting to concern themselves with the practicalities of looms, dye-vats or kilns, especially those who had first tasted the freedom of hard practical work while nursing or driving ambulances during the First World War',[5] as an attractive alternative to returning to the restrictions of the family life they had known before. It would appear that Pleydell-Bouverie was one such young woman.

On her return to Britain, no doubt like countless others of her generation, Pleydell-Bouverie found it difficult to settle. Much in the world she had known in her youth – not least the somewhat restrictive social life of the country house – had changed forever. As she explained many years later, 'Looking back, I suppose that many of my generation, growing up in the First World War, with the known world falling about our ears, found ourselves very much subject to chance in the direction of our future lives.'[6]

Pleydell-Bouverie first became aware of contemporary pottery in London in 1921, where she had undertaken self-directed study of history at the British Museum. Margery Fry, sister of art critic and painter Roger Fry, showed her some of the earthenware pots that her brother had made for the short-lived Omega Workshops that he had established in 1913.

3. Doris Pleydell-Bouverie, 'My Cousin: An Appreciation', in *Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie – A Potter's Life 1895–1985*, Crafts Council, 1986 (henceforth 'CC 1986'), pp.13–20.
4. Alison Light, *Forever England*, Routledge, 1991, p.7. Also note 7, p.225.
5. Isabelle Anscombe, *A Woman's Touch Women in Design from 1860 to the Present Day*, Virago, 1984, p.147.
6. Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, 'A Chance Account', CSC, 1980, p.16.

Pleydell-Bouverie had grown up surrounded by the family collection of Chinese blue and white and *famille verte* porcelain,[7] but Fry's pots were completely different from any with which she was familiar. She became interested in making pots and enrolled in evening classes at the Central School of Arts and Crafts.

Pleydell-Bouverie met Leach at an exhibition of his work in London in 1923. Over half a century later she recalled: 'I walked by chance into Paterson's small gallery in Bond Street and found the walls lined, and myself surrounded, by the sort of pots I had never seen before. Quiet coloured, gentle surfaced pots, with a pleasant sense of peace about them.'[8] This was the first exhibition of 'modern stoneware' that she had ever seen and she 'thought it was wonderful'.[9] For the first time she became aware of the work of studio potters and the inspiration they took from classical Chinese wares. It is significant in the light of the work that she developed in her own career that already at this early stage in her training Pleydell-Bouverie was attracted by the 'quiet' colours and 'gentle' surfaces of Leach's pots, with 'a sense of peace about them'.

On that occasion of their first meeting, Pleydell-Bouverie 'with considerable brashness' asked Leach to think of her 'if he ever considered taking a pupil'.[10] At first he refused her request, and advised her to continue at art school. She heeded this advice and spent a further year at the Central School of Art, now as a full-time student. Dora Billington (1890–1968) was then teaching there, having joined the staff in 1919. Recalling her time at the Central affectionately Pleydell-Bouverie described the atmosphere as 'disorganised but enthusiastic'. It was however from 'a marvellous man called Askew who was a positive genius at throwing' that she learned how to throw. She remembered that 'He didn't have much idea of shapes, but he could throw anything. He had beautiful hands'.[11] Leach later agreed to take on Pleydell-Bouverie as a pupil. Thus, at the age of 28, she was ready to begin the next stage of her pottery training.

7. Barley Roscoe, 'Introduction', CSC1980, p.6.
8. Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, 'Tribute to Bernard Leach', *Ceramic Review*, No. 58, July/Aug.1979, p.21.
9. Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, 'At St. Ives in the Early Years', *Bernard Leach –Essays in Appreciation*, The Editorial Committee of the N.Z. Potter, 1960, p.29.
10. Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, 'Tribute to Bernard Leach', *Ceramic Review*, No. 58, July/Aug 1979, p.21.
11. Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie quoted in Fiona Adamczewski, 'Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie', *Crafts*, No. 19, March/April 1976, pp.13–16.

She first visited the Leach pottery in September 1923 'for a week or so for a preliminary test' and, based on this it was agreed that she could start working at the pottery as a paying pupil – or in Pleydell-Bouverie's own words 'a paying stooge'.[13] The terms as laid out in a letter from Leach were that a '£26 premium' should be paid by Pleydell-Bouverie 'to cover six months at £1 per week'. This was then to be followed by 'six months without payment' and a further 'one year at a salary of £1 per week'.[12] In the event, Pleydell-Bouverie stayed for just one year. It has been suggested that one of the reasons that Leach changed his mind about taking her on as a pupil, was that the money she paid was no doubt appreciated at the time, as the pottery was financially precarious for much of its early existence and was still struggling to survive.[14] Pleydell-Bouverie and other paying students who came later were a welcome source of both free labour and revenue for the pottery.[15]

It is not known why Pleydell-Bouverie decided to spend just one year at St Ives. Cardew, her immediate predecessor, remained for three years (1923–26), as did Norah Braden, who stayed from 1925 to 1928. One possible reason may have been that she did not wish to be away from home, and particularly from her mother, for a longer period. In response to Leach's letter offering her a position at the pottery, Pleydell-Bouverie had replied:

> My plans are a little complicated by the fact that my mother dislikes my living away from home and thinks the craze for pottery making is mad but is at the same time so kind about it that I am bound to consider her wishes. That would mean that I should have to break my time as a pupil and apprentice at intervals to be with her a bit.[16]

Also, she may have felt that after a year she had learned all that she could at St Ives and that what she now required was practice and experience, which could be achieved in a workshop of her own.

13. Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, 'At St. Ives in the Early Years', in *Bernard Leach – Essays in Appreciation*, The Editorial Committee of N.Z. Potter, 1960, p.29.
12. Letter from Bernard Leach to Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, 20th Jan. 1923, copy in LA / CSC (LA6540).
14. Oliver Watson, 'The St Ives Pottery', *St Ives 1939–1964 Twenty Five Years of Painting, Sculpture and Pottery*, Tate Gallery, p.222.
15. As an indication of the value of Pleydell-Bouverie's financial contribution, the amount she paid averaging out at ten shillings a week over the year, was exactly the same as the weekly rent paid by Michael Cardew to the Butler family for the former Greet Pottery (which was later known as Winchcombe Pottery), when he first began renting it two years later in 1926, Cardew biography (1989 edition), p.60.
16. Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, letter to Bernard Leach, 7th Dec. 1923, LA/CSC (LA11879).

In the same letter in which he had outlined the terms and conditions of her proposed 'apprenticeship', Leach included a candid account of what working at the pottery entailed. This was perhaps, intended to dispel any unrealistic or romantic notions that Pleydell-Bouverie may have had regarding the life of a potter:

> it is hard work of any woman not to say man, and she would have to be prepared to take the rough with the smooth. We do every thing with our hands from the wood splitting and mixing of clays to throwing and packing. That is to say the techniques of the East where no machinery is employed; we get dirty and tired, hot and cold, and unusual enthusiasm is the sole panacea.[17]

As Pleydell-Bouverie arrived to start work in St Ives in January 1924, Hamada was preparing to return home to Japan. Cardew had been there since the previous year, and Matsubayashi was at work rebuilding the Japanese-style climbing kiln. According to Cardew, it was at Hamada's farewell exhibition at the Paterson Gallery in London in the late autumn of 1923 that he first met Pleydell-Bouverie. He later recalled his first impressions of her:

> I had been expecting someone fragile and over-civilised, very delicate, very 'Dresden China'. But to my relief I found myself talking to a tall, strong girl, not much older than me, who was built like a peasant, with a peasant's large and practical hands. Not that the delicacy and the civilisation were absent: you were aware of it in the twinkling of her eyes, set deep and almost lost in her cheeks; and above all in the curve of her mouth, which was sensitive and finely drawn, in contrast with the robust scale on which she was built. Perhaps she owed this happy blend to her Huguenot ancestors.[18]

In describing how their friendship evolved in that year that they were both at St Ives, Cardew, who like Pleydell-Bouverie had lost an elder brother in the First World War observed:

> We both belonged to a generation for whom the war was still the dominating factor of life not only because of the tragedies it had brought but for the mental revolutions it caused in all who came anywhere near it. As a result, we both felt baffled by the spectacle of Bernard Leach – a man who had spent those fateful years so far removed that he now appeared to our irreverent eyes to be a perfectly preserved specimen of a pre-war Edwardian gentleman.[19]

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17. Letter from Bernard Leach to Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, 20th Jan. 1923, LA /CSC (LA6540).
18. Michael Cardew, 'St. Ives and Coleshill Days', CSC 1980, p.10. In an account in her essay 'A Personal Account', published in *Michael Cardew* – a collection of essays with an introduction by Bernard Leach, Crafts Advisory Committee, 1976, p.35, Pleydell-Bouverie gives the Leach Pottery in St Ives as the site of their first meeting, when she arrived there to begin her training in early 1924.
19. Michael Cardew, 'St. Ives and Coleshill Days', CSC 1980, p.11.

It would appear that Pleydell-Bouverie did not make many pots during her training, or receive any formal instruction from Leach, as such. Instead she joined in with the others working there, participating in all the general work of the pottery, including turning her hand to any necessary odd jobs. She seems to have spent much of her time laboriously grinding cobalt by hand.[20] 'In some Japanese potteries' Leach writes in *A Potter's Book*, 'one may still find an old woman constantly employed grinding Chinese cobalt with a pestle and mortar'.[21] He then elaborates on the superior qualities of hand-ground pigments compared to those mechanically ground, which is the reason, no doubt, that he set Pleydell-Bouverie this monotonous task.

From the point of learning the practical and technical aspects of being a potter, Matsubayashi had a far greater impact on Pleydell-Bouverie's future practice than Leach. As she recalled some fifty-five years later:

> He [Leach] was a generous boss, never refusing information or advice when asked, but not in the least overbearing. His pupils, therefore, were free to develop along their own lines, and one learnt more by observation than by precept […] Of direct instruction there was, I believe, not much: and it was Matsu [Matsubayashi Tsurunosuke], a complacent little man who rebuilt Bernard's stoneware kiln […] who used to give us all (Bernard included) solemn lectures on serious subjects such as 'the making of the stoneware cray [clay] body'.[22]

Matsubayashi set Cardew the hard work of making bricks for building the new kiln, and it is likely that Pleydell-Bouverie also helped in aspects of the construction. As Cardew states in his biography, they all 'worked as his [Matsubayashi's] supporting labourers'.[23]

In the rigid class system of the time, it was rare for anyone middle class to become a potter. In 1926 Cardew received advice from Mr Collins of Truro Pottery, a traditional country pottery in Cornwall: 'It is a foolish idea for someone like you to try to be a potter. It isn't work for a gentleman.' For a middle, or upper class woman to become a potter was even more unusual. However, as a member of the aristocracy Pleydell-Bouverie's privilege gave her the freedom to pursue her interests without the necessity of having to earn a living, or concern

20. Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, 'At St. Ives in the Early Years', *Bernard Leach – Essays in Appreciation*, The Editorial Committee of N.Z. Potter, 1960, p.31.
21. Bernard Leach, *A Potter's Book*, (1973 edition) p.129.
22. Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, 'A Chance Account', CSC 1980, p.16.
23. Cardew biography, 1989 edition, p.39.

herself with the social conventions of the period. In this she was similar to another member of the aristocracy who had preceded her in becoming a potter, Sir Edmund Elton (1846–1920) maker of 'Elton Ware' Arts and Crafts style pottery. Garth Clark wrote that 'Elton, belonging to the aristocracy, did not have to protect his status as a gentleman. It was his by birth and so, without considering whether it was respectable or not, he voluntarily assumed all the common labours of the potter'.[24]

After leaving St Ives Pleydell-Bouverie established a studio in the Mill Cottage of the family estate in Berkshire in 1925. Her partner Ada Mason, whom she had met at the Central School of Art and had been with her in St Ives, assisted with this project. According to Cardew, who from 1926 was a frequent visitor to Coleshill during his early years at Winchcombe some 55km away: 'The house looked out over a great park, at the bottom of which, beside the little River Cole, there was an old mill which she had converted into a pottery, and in which she lived and worked.'[25] It was here that Pleydell-Bouverie produced what in time would become her most admired and successful work.

## 3.2: The formative influences and historical precedents that contributed to the development of Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie's work

### The influence of Chinese Sung Dynasty Pottery

Throughout her career the foremost influence on Pleydell-Bouverie's work was glazed pottery from the Sung Dynasty in China (960–1279 CE). It was only in the early twentieth century that such wares became available in the West, as great numbers of pots were unearthed when ancient burial sites in China were disturbed during large-scale railway construction projects. Some of these pieces quickly made their way into collections overseas. An exhibition of early Chinese pottery and porcelain was organised by the Burlington Fine Art Club in London in 1910,[26] and Paterson's Gallery showed an exhibition of early Chinese art, including Han, Tang, Sung and Ming ceramics in 1920.[27]

24. Clark, *The Potter's Art*, 1995, p.129.
25. Cardew biography, 1989 edition, p.77.
26. Edward Dillon, 'Chinese Pottery and Porcelain at the Burlington Fine Arts Club', *The Burlington* magazine, Vol. 17, No. 88, July 1910, pp.210–13.
27. For a detailed discussion of exhibitions (and exhibition reviews) of both Oriental Art and studio pottery in England in the early twentieth century, see Julian Stair's essay 'Genius and Circumstance: Early Criticism of Hamada's Pottery in England', in *Shoji Hamada – Master Potter*, edited by Timothy Wilcox, Lund Humphries, 1998, pp.16–20.

Emmanuel Cooper wrote of the studio potters who emerged in Britain in the 1920s:

> The prevailing aesthetic of these potters was dominated by early Chinese ceramics, in particular those of the Sung Dynasty […] With their powerful sense of form, minimal decoration and simplicity of glaze, Sung-dynasty ceramics became part of the modernist principles of greatness in art. The formal, austere beauty of the wares proved a major inspiration, with critics comparing the work of modern potters to progressive sculpture and modern music.[28]

Thus early studio potters' appreciation of Sung pottery was very much in line with the aesthetics of the contemporary modernist movement, which saw a turning away from overly decorated Victorian art pottery, towards more subtle, simplified, and streamline forms.

In 'Towards a Standard', the first chapter of *A Potter's Book*, Leach stated that the studio potter is constrained to:

> Look to the best of the earliest periods for inspiration and may, so far as stoneware and porcelain are concerned, accept the Sung standard without hesitation. As it is, there are a few English craftsman potters to-day who do accept it, and their work is incomparably the best that is now being turned out.[29]

He elaborated on this theme in an endnote:

> Accepting the 'Sung standard' is a very different thing from imitating particular Sung pieces. It means the use so far as possible of natural materials in the endeavour to obtain the best quality of body and glaze; in throwing and in a striving towards unity, spontaneity, and simplicity of form, and in general the subordination of all attempts at technical cleverness to straightforward, unselfconscious workmanship.[30]

Leach further reinforced his conviction regarding the supremacy of Sung wares when he stated: 'Our need of a criterion in pottery is apparent and seems to be provided by the work of the T'ang and Sung potters which during the last twenty years has been widely accepted as the noblest achievement in ceramics.'[31]

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28. Emmanuel Cooper, *Bernard Leach Life & Work*, Yale University Press, 2003, p.xii.
29. Bernard Leach, *A Potter's Book*, (1973 edition), pp.5-6.
30. Leach, *A Potter's Book* (1973 edition), p.6.
31. Ibid., p.10.

Similarly inspired by Sung wares, it was to be expected that Pleydell-Bouverie would wish to carry out research with the aim of developing an understanding of how the qualities that these pots possessed had been achieved, and strive to obtain similar qualities in her own work. Pleydell-Bouverie's cousin Doris recalled that 'in the Library [at Coleshill] were her Tang figures and the great Sung vase'.[32] This vase was no doubt among the touchstones used by Pleydell-Bouverie throughout her career for the standard and quality of glaze that she strove to achieve.

**Contemporary pottery**

It was seeing examples of Roger Fry's pots that had first attracted Pleydell-Bouverie's attention to contemporary pottery and led to her decision to learn to make pots. However, it is clear from her response to this work, that she did not take it very seriously, as she described many years later: 'The first pots I ever looked at were Roger's funny Omega things […] I don't know quite why I was interested.'[33] Fry's work could perhaps be described as being clumsy, displaying a certain lack of skill as a potter. After initially hand throwing pots he later designed forms that were industrially produced in moulds created from the hand-thrown originals.[34]

The most obvious and formative influences on Pleydell-Bouverie's career occurred during the year that she spent at St Ives. Her time there also had an impact on many other aspects of her life. She remained friends with both Leach and Cardew throughout their lives. They both pre-deceased her, in 1979 and 1983 respectively. At St Ives Pleydell-Bouverie was, no doubt like Cardew before her, and the many who succeeded them in the following years, involved in discussion of the merits of the pots in Leach's personal collection. We know from written accounts that this collection eventually included Korean stoneware and porcelain made during the later Yi Dynasty, an Ido-type rice bowl, as well as Chinese Sung Dynasty, medieval English and later slipware pots.[35]

32. Doris Pleydell-Bouverie, 'My Cousin: An Appreciation', in CC 1986, p.20.
33. Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, quoted in 'A Visit to Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie', Eileen Lewenstein and Emmanuel Cooper, *Ceramic Review*, No. 30, 1974, p.4–6.
34. Julian Stair, 'The Employment of Matter: Pottery of the Omega Workshops', published in *Beyond Bloomsbury – Designs of the Omega Workshop 1913–1919*, editor Alexandra Gerstein, Courtauld Gallery, 2009, p.30.
35. Bernard Leach, *Beyond East and West – Memoirs, Portraits and Essays*, Faber and Faber, 1978, p.128–129, 130. See also George Wingfield Digby, 'Pots of Inspiration – Bernard Leach's Personal Collection at the Holburne Museum, Bath', *The Burlington Magazine,* Vol. 121, No. 915 (June 1979), pp.400–401.

While she admired Leach's personal work, Pleydell-Bouverie preferred the work of another contemporary, William Staite Murray (1881–1962), whose approach to pottery was very different from that of Leach. Staite Murray rose to prominence in the interwar period and successfully exhibited to great acclaim in the most prestigious galleries, charging what was considered at the time to be very high prices for his work.[36] In a letter to Leach in 1930 Pleydell-Bouverie wrote of Staite Murray's work: 'I […] respect his pots immensely. But I'm not Murray any more than I'm a Chinaman.'[37] She did not wish to make work just like Staite Murray's, any more than she wished to reproduce Chinese Sung wares.

In *The Potter's Art*, Garth Clark states that both Cardew and Pleydell-Bouverie concurred with the *Spectator* critic, who had not only described Staite Murray as 'the most powerful potter in England', but considered that his work had 'a greater potential energy in its conception' than that of Leach.[38] Cardew and Pleydell-Bouverie were, however, from a sense of loyalty to Leach, reluctant to praise Staite Murray's work in public.[39] Clark added that 'Pleydell-Bouverie had later admitted that it was Murray who was the aesthetic genius of the pioneer years, since 'there was a real splendour about [his] pots'. Paul Rice recounts that he had been told by Pleydell-Bouverie that 'Murray was the potter that she most admired and who, surprisingly, was the greatest influence on her work'.[40]

To gain a greater understanding of the contemporary influences on Pleydell-Bouverie, and the subsequent development of her work, it is illuminating to consider the contrast in the approaches between Leach and Staite Murray. They are widely regarded to have been the two most dominant figures involved in pottery in Britain in the interwar years. Staite Murray considered pottery as an art and viewed it as 'a link between painting and sculpture'. He stated in an article in 1925:

> The potter may be influenced by traditional forms, and yet his personality is so marked in his work as to re-interpret the form, fully appreciated by the Chinese or Japanese, whose sensibility to pottery forms is generally more acute than our own.[41]

36. Garth Clark, 'Murray and Leach: A Study in Contrasts', *Studio Potter*, Vol. 27, No. 2, June 1999, p.22.
37. Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, letter to Bernard Leach, 29th June 1930, LA/CSC (LA2500).
38. Clark, *The Potter's Art*, 1995, p.141.
39. In his autobiography (first published 1988), Cardew describes having being scolded by Pleydell-Bouverie in 1928 for praising Staite Murray's pots during a conversation with the art critic from *The Times*, 1989 edition, pp.69–70.
40. Paul Rice, *British Studio Ceramics*, Crowood, 2002, p.50.
41. W. Staite Murray, 'Pottery from the Artist's Point of View, *Artwork*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (May–August 1925), p.202.

Later in the same article Staite Murray stated that in pottery 'the forms are abstractions and as such readily contemplated as pure form'. At their best, it can be seen that Pleydell-Bouverie pursued this direction in developing the forms of her large vases and bowls.

Staite Murray's work mainly consisted of individual pieces with abstract painted designs, intended for exhibition in fine art galleries alongside contemporary painting and sculpture. This he considered was the appropriate setting for his pots, so that they could be observed and contemplated in a space that allowed adequate opportunity for this. The pots, many of which were large in scale, were vigorously thrown with the marks left by the process of throwing remaining clearly visible underneath the glaze and painted surfaces. Individual pots were given titles including *The Bather* – one of Staite Murray's most famous pieces, *Persian Garden,* and *Motet for Strings*.

Potter and craft historian Julian Stair makes the distinction between Leach and Staite Murray – the former a revivalist, the latter aligning himself with the modernist movement in art and architecture.[42] The perceived rivalry between the two could be said to be between tradition – as represented by Leach, and Modernism as represented by Staite Murray. In this context Pleydell-Bouverie would probably have aligned her views more with Staite Murray the Modernist, than with Leach. She appreciated that Staite Murray's work was not bound by tradition, and, although he gained inspiration from Sung and other Chinese wares in the earlier stages of his career, he later developed a style that was very much his own.

The perceived division between Staite Murray and Leach in the 1920s and 1930s has also been discussed in terms of 'the fine art pot' versus 'the ethical pot'.[43] Oliver Watson was the first to discuss the concept that led to the use of this term:

> Pottery as a craft offered a vocation with ethical and social interests […]. But there were also those who saw the potential of pottery simply as an art form with none of the wider social and moral overtones; they wished to pull pottery from the craft world into that of fine art.[44]

42. Julian Stair, 'From Precepts to Praxis: The Origins of British Studio Pottery', in *Things of Beauty Growing*, Yale University Press, 2017, pp.45, 47.
43. Clark, *The Art of the Potter*, 1995, p.137.
44. Oliver Watson, *British Studio Pottery: The Victoria and Albert Museum Collection*, Phaidon, 1990, p.15, 18.

The ethical pot as a term associated with Leach was one in which function, tradition, and truth to materials were priorities.

In the early 1930s a change occurred which saw, firstly critics, and subsequently collectors, gradually turn away from the high-priced individual pots of the art gallery setting, and instead appreciating the attributes of more affordable and functional pots. This change in attitude has been attributed to a series of publications, both by Leach and others.[45] The sentiments that were expressed found growing approval during the Great Depression (1929–39). In hindsight, Leach's argument, and his veiled attack on Staite Murray's work have been viewed as being somewhat hypocritical, given his own practice of making expensive individual pieces aimed at the collectors' market, in addition to a more obviously functional and less expensive range. The shift in perception concerning the purpose and status of studio pottery led to an increase in popularity of functional pots and a decline in support for collectors' pieces.

Pleydell-Bouverie did not set out to make pots that would have been consistent with Leach's categorisation of the separate ranges of work to be produced at the pottery in St Ives, as he described in a letter to Matsubayashi in January 1927:

> Of course I shall continue to spend at least half time on making my free personal pottery, but from now we begin to standardise and repeat for people like ourselves of moderate means to buy to use. This will be our 'bread and butter work'.[46]

Due to her financial independence there was never a necessity for Pleydell-Bouverie to concern herself with such distinctions. She spent her career focussing on making the range of pots that she wanted to make. Her bottles, vases and bowls, considered to be her strongest forms, were those most collected by museums and collectors. They are also those that are most familiar from illustrations in magazines, books and exhibition catalogues. Unlike Leach or Staite Murray, she did not put high prices on her individual pots as she was not concerned about increasing the status of her work by elevating its price. In her position

45. The first of these was *A Potter's Outlook*, Handworkers' Pamphlets No.3, published by New Handworker's Gallery, London, in 1928.
46. Letter from Bernard Leach to Matsubayashi Tsurunosuke dated 10th Jan 1927, in the Matsubayashi Family Archive of the Asahi Pottery Japan (henceforth 'MF Archive'), (asahi050-243). Reproduced in 'Matsubayashi Tsurunosuke and British Studio Pottery 1924-1928: Letters from Bernard Leach, Michael Cardew, Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie and Ada Mason', by Maezaki Shinya, in *English Ceramic Circle Transactions*, No. 22, 2011, pp.130–147, (henceforth 'Maezaki, ECCT 2011'.)

of independence, it would appear that being occasionally happy with the results that she achieved was all the reward that she sought from her work.

Staite Murray was the only potter member of the 'Seven and Five Society', a group of fine artists founded in 1920, described as 'the most exciting exhibiting group in Britain of its time'.[47] The Society, which continued in existence until 1935, included amongst its members Ben and Winifred Nicholson, Barbara Hepworth, and Henry Moore. Whether Staite Murray's work and that of other contemporary potters was in fact regarded as being on a par with the fine arts is a matter of discussion. Imogen Hart has argued that in exhibiting State Murray's pots alongside paintings by Ben and Winifred Nicholson 'it was not so much that the difference between paintings and pots was erased, but that their potential to illuminate one another was taken seriously'.[48] Exhibiting together served to mutually enhance the characteristics of both pottery and painting.

It was against this background that Pleydell-Bouverie produced her wood-fired ash-glazed work – the most successful of her career.

### 3.3: The evolution and reception of Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie's work 1925–1939

Though Pleydell-Bouverie made few if any pots during her year at St Ives, she had discovered an absorbing subject for research. Once she had established her workshop at home, she was ready to start producing her own work. As a young potter whose experience thus far consisted of one year's full-time study at art school and a further year at the Leach Pottery, starting out on her own would probably have been a daunting prospect, had it been necessary for her to earn a living from her work. In her privileged circumstances she was at liberty to devote her time to glaze research, producing any type of pots that she wished.

It is of relevance here to consider the processes and materials that Pleydell-Bouverie used in producing her work and the specific effects that she achieved. In the practice of woodfiring the kiln plays a central role in the process; thus woodfire aesthetics and woodfire kilns are

47. Willoughby Gerrish, *The Seven and Five Society 1920–1935*, catalogue of an exhibition shown at The Fine Art Society, July 2014, p.11.
48. Imogen Hart, 'Things in Combination: Exhibiting Pots, in *Things of Beauty*, 2017, p.98.

inextricably linked. The kiln Pleydell-Bouverie used, together with the range of materials were responsible for the qualities achieved in her finished work.

The new climbing kiln at St Ives was completed in the Spring of the year that Pleydell-Bouverie spent there. In addition to the first and unsuccessful firing, she experienced three further firings.[49] Despite the difficulties, the discomfort, and levels of physical labour involved, it is understandable that when the time came for her to decide on a kiln for her own use, she chose a woodfire kiln. Having been attracted by the qualities of Leach's pots, it was natural that she would want a woodfire kiln of a kind in which it would be possible to achieve similar effects. In addition, Matsubayashi's lectures in St Ives on the technical aspects of Japanese pottery and kiln construction which Pleydell-Bouverie noted so diligently, would likely have emphasised woodfiring. In common with many traditional potteries in Japan at that time, woodfiring was practiced at Matsubayashi's own family's workshop, the Asahi Pottery.[50] Before travelling to Britain, he had carried out a detailed survey of kilns in the main pottery production areas throughout Japan.[51]

The kiln at Coleshill was designed by Matsubayashi and built in spring 1925 'during a hectic holiday fortnight by a furnace builder from the Great Western works at Swindon'.[52] In an article by Fiona Adamczewski based on an interview with Pleydell-Bouverie, published in *Crafts* magazine in 1976 the kiln is described as 'a two-chamber kiln, [measuring] 3 foot by 4 foot by 4 foot [0.91m x 1.22m x 1.22m]'.[53] Pleydell-Bouverie remembered that:

> The flames started in a pit beneath the kiln and the fire went up and over the two chambers and then first into a horizontal chimney and finally into an upright

49. In a letter to Matsubayashi Tsurunosuke dated 2nd Sept. 1924, Pleydell-Bouverie mentions that they were getting ready for a third firing 'in about three weeks', MF Archive (asahi050-029). A further firing took place in either Nov. or Dec. before Pleydell-Bouverie and Ada Mason left St. Ives, as described by Leach in a letter to Matsubayashi Tsurunosuke dated 23rd Dec. 1924, MF Archive (asahi050-129). Both letters reproduced in Maezaki, ECCT 2011.
50. An article 'Woodfiring at the Asahi Pottery – sixteen generations', by Matsubayashi Yusuke (potter, current head of the Asahi Pottery, and great-great-nephew of Matsubayashi Tsurunosuke), was published in *The Log Book*, issue 67, 2016, pp.16–22.
51. Maezaki Shinya, in 'A Legacy of Matsubayashi Tsurunosuke in St Ives: Introduction of Japanese Ceramic Making to the British Studio Pottery', published in *Beyond Boundaries – East and West Cross-Cultural Encounters*, edited by Michelle Ying Ling Huan, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011, p.113. Matsubayashi's thesis on the subject of this kiln survey is in the Matsubayashi Family Archive, Japan.
52. Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, 'A Chance Account', CSC 1980, p.16.
53. In her essay in CC 1986, Pleydell-Bouverie's cousin Doris gives the dimensions of the kiln as 'about four foot wide on the entrance side, six foot six inches deep and about five foot six inches high, not really enough room to stand up in'. CC 1986, p.16.

chimney and the flame sometimes came out to ten feet above that. It used a lot of wood. As much as 2 tons per firing'.[54]

From this description it seems likely that the Coleshill kiln differed from the St Ives kiln in some respects. This could be considered surprising, in that it might be expected that Pleydell-Bouverie would have wanted a kiln similar to the one she had assisted to fire. It could be that at St Ives Matsubayashi had to work within the confines of the previous kiln built by Leach and Hamada, and as such was rebuilding rather than constructing a completely new kiln. Given the freedom to design a new kiln to be built at Coleshill, Matsubayashi may have chosen a different type based on his research of kilns. Having experienced the difficulties of firing the kiln at St Ives, perhaps Pleydell-Bouverie was anxious to try a different, and hopefully more efficient type of woodfire kiln, in terms of the length of firing and amount of fuel used.

Though the Coleshill kiln was smaller than the St Ives kiln, it was nonetheless relatively large, given that Pleydell-Bouverie generally only worked with one other potter. The inaugural firing of the new kiln was used as an opportunity to fire saggars and kiln props which would be required for subsequent firings of glazed work. Leach visited and helped with this firing which reached the required temperature in 30 hours.[55]

The kiln at Coleshill was fired four or five times annually for the following fourteen years. Obtaining wood for firing – which was a difficulty for Leach in Cornwall – was not a problem for Pleydell-Bouverie. Temperatures, often up to 1350°C and higher were reached in firings that generally lasted some thirty-six hours, though sometimes were as short as 24 hours.[56] Particularly in the beginning, there were problems in reaching temperature – and one firing in late 1925 continued for an incredible 78 hours.[57] The cause of these problems was identified when Leach visited again in 1926, and alterations were subsequently carried out to the kiln. In a letter to Matsubayashi dated 2nd July 1926, Ada Mason explained that

54. Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, quoted in *Crafts*, No. 19, March/April 1976, p.16.
55. Letter from Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie to Matsubayashi Tsurunosuke, 22nd June 1925, MF Archive (asahi050-043). Maezaki, ECCT, 2011.
56. Letter from Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie to Bernard Leach, 15th Aug. 1928, LA/CSC (LA2493).
57. Letter from Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie to Matsubayashi Tsurunosuke, 19th Jan. 1926, MF Archive (asahi050-042). Reproduced in Maezaki, ECCT, 2011. There is also a description of this epic firing in a letter from Pleydell-Bouverie to Leach, dated 13th December 1925, LA/CSC (LA2418).

they had misread his kiln plan and made the chimney cross-section too small.[58] However, other problems persisted, as evidenced by references in Pleydell-Bouverie's letters to Leach in the following years. There is much hoping for success with her own firings as well as wishing him luck with his.[59]

Despite these difficulties Pleydell-Bouverie's kiln could be considered as having been suitable for her requirements, given the kind of glaze effects that she wished to achieve. Built of a heavy mass of refractory material – firebricks – the kiln took a long time to reach temperature, and a much longer time to cool down. It is through slow cooling that many consider that particular glaze effects can be achieved, and that it was this aspect of the firing/cooling process that was responsible for the glaze qualities achieved in the classic Oriental glazed wares. Pleydell-Bouverie's glazed work was generally fired in saggars, as Sung wares had been. These saggars added to the thermal mass and further slowed the rate of cooling, and consequently its impact on the glaze effects achieved.

The alternate cycles of reduction and oxidation that occur naturally in woodfire kilns are also conducive to the atmospheric conditions believed to generate the effects achieved in some of the classic Oriental glazes. Where work was fired in saggars made of refractory material, reduction gasses were able to pass through them easily, whereas when more vitreous saggars made of finer clays were used, it was necessary to make perforations in them to achieve good reduction effects.[60] Pleydell-Bouverie made her own saggars using local clays. It is likely therefore that they were of a more refractory material and that the phases of reduction from woodfiring could readily impact on the glazed pots packed inside them.

As Pleydell-Bouverie's kiln created such a spectacle when firing at night, with flames emerging several feet out of the chimney, she had to stop using it at the outbreak of the Second World War, due to blackout restrictions. After the War she moved to Kilmington Manor near Warminster in Wiltshire, where throughout her remaining years she continued her experiments with ash glazes, first in an oil-fired kiln, and later in an electric kiln.

58. Letter from Ada Mason to Matsubayashi Tsurunosuke, 2nd July 1926, MF Archive (asahi050-150). Reproduced in Maezaki, ECCT, 2011.
59. Letters from Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie to Bernard Leach in the LA/CSC.
60. Wood, *Chinese Glazes*, 1999, p.119.

Since she was only fifty when she moved to Kilmington in 1946, it is surprising that Pleydell-Bouverie did not have the Coleshill woodfire kiln rebuilt at the new workshop, or have a new, smaller, single chamber kiln constructed in anticipation of her advancing years. Instead she changed to using an entirely new type of fuel and kiln, of which she had no previous experience. However, the only designs of woodfire kilns suitable for firing to stoneware temperatures that she was probably then familiar with were all relatively large-scale and based on Oriental models. If she had visited any of the remaining country or traditional potteries at the time, their kilns, which were generally large for workshop production, were not suitable for firing to stoneware temperatures. Small-scale woodfire kiln for use by studio potters for firing stoneware had not yet been developed in Britain, though they had been in use in France from as early as 1942/43.

Another consideration is that the kiln at St Ives had been converted from firing with wood to oil in 1937. Leach described the effect of the changeover in an account of an oil firing in *A Potter's Book*: 'by two o'clock, after twenty hours of stoking, the firing was done […] and we went to bed tired, but not exhausted as in the old days.'[61] This may have been the primary attraction of oil firing for Pleydell-Bouverie. She reflected on her oil-fired kiln in 1980:

> At that time […] few people knew much about oil kilns. I, of course, knew virtually nothing. However with old age looming around the corner and no gas to be had, an oil kiln seemed the thing to make; so in a state of cheerful incompetence and gallantly helped by Norah [Braden] I built one. It was at least as temperamental as the wood kiln, but not quite as energy consuming. The first firing went off with a roar and a series of loud explosions as the raw pots burst; but after a few alterations in the size and make of the burners and blowers, that trouble was corrected.[62]

She added: 'The [oil] kiln and I persisted in a slightly uneasy fellowship till thirty hour firings became too much for a septuagenarian and I opted for electricity, lower temperatures and an easy life'.

Describing the differences between the three types of kilns that she had used in her career, Pleydell-Bouverie said of the woodfire kiln that it was 'a fairly rough and ready affair, temperamental, wasteful of fuel and quite laborious to work. But it produced some nice

61. Leach, *A Potter's Book* (1973 edition), p.253.
62. Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, CSC1980, p.17.

glazes and the whole experience was very rewarding'.[63] She described the oil-fired kiln as 'a good servant', but referred to the woodfire kiln as 'an inspired partner'.[64] In the 1976 interview with Fiona Adamczewski, when asked whether she regretted the change from wood, Pleydell-Bouverie replied 'When you're old it makes sense'. But of course 'it's not alive'.[65]

Although she never travelled to Japan, despite having been invited to do so by Matsubayashi,[66] Pleydell-Bouverie's working methods were much influenced by Japanese ceramic practices. Leach's methods including such basic processes as preparing clay for throwing – the spiral method of wedging clay – were Japanese in style. As the St Ives pottery was jointly established by Leach, together with Hamada, other processes at the pottery including preparation of materials for making glazes were likely to also have been modelled on traditional Japanese methods. At the time that Pleydell-Bouverie was at the pottery everything was done in the traditional Japanese manner without the use of any labour-saving machines or equipment. As Pleydell-Bouverie stated in a letter to Leach in 1930: 'I hadn't realised before how closely St Ives was modelled on a Japanese pottery.'[67]

Two examples illustrate Pleydell-Bouverie's continued use of Japanese tools and machinery in her own practice. Fiona Adamczewski wrote after her 1976 visit to the Kilmington Manor workshop that 'she still works on the Japanese stick-wheel made for her by Matsubayashi'.[68] The photograph (Figure 10) on page 109 shows Pleydell-Bouverie throwing on a wheel, the wheel head of which is very large in diameter. This would suggest that it may be the Japanese stick wheel. Photographs taken at Kilmington in the 1980s show her seated and throwing on a variation of a treadle or kick wheel, which is most likely that which she referred to as 'the Devonshire wheel' in correspondence in 1925.[69.]

63. Ibid., p.17.
64. Quoted in Rice, *British Studio Ceramics*, 2002, p.48.
65. *Crafts*, No. 19, March/April 1976, p.16.
66. Letter from Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie to Matsubayashi Tsurunosuke, MF Archive, (asahi050-032).
67. Letter from Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie to Bernard Leach, dated 29th June 1930, LA/CSC (LA2500).
68. *Crafts*, March/April 1976, p.16. It was in fact Matsubayashi's brother who had arranged to have the wheel made for Pleydell-Bouverie in Japan in 1924, whilst Matsubayashi himself was still in Europe. From correspondence from Pleydell-Bouverie in the Asahi Pottery Archives it is known that the wheel arrived in England in September, whilst Pleydell-Bouverie was still at St Ives (asahi050-029; asahi050-030; asahi050-034; asahi050-022) and had been assembled ready for working by April 1925 (asahi050-046). ). In Maezaki, ECCT, 2011.
69. Letter from Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie to Matsubayashi Tsurunosuke, 15th Aug. 1925 (asahi050-044).

In 1980 Henry Hammond wrote after a recent visit to Kilmington Manor:

> The barn, where Beano has her workshop, was once the malt house of the Abbey of Shaftesbury, an entrancing, stone structure with its wooden-strutted roof and cobwebs. There one can find her [electric] kiln and the machine Matsu made her for crushing grog.[70]

The breakthrough in Pleydell-Bouverie's work seems to have come when she first began experimenting with ash glazes. Though there are various accounts as to how she first became interested and involved in this research, she wrote that:

> As it happened, it was from a quite casual conversation with Bernard [Leach] about ashes used in Chinese glazes that caused Ada Mason (Peter), another ex-Central student and my first partner, to go back to my home at Coleshill to see what English wood and weeds would do in the fire.[71]

However, in a letter from Pleydell-Bouverie to Matsubayashi dated 12th October 1924, while she was still at St Ives, she included an account of tests made using reeds, box, and beech nuts, which would indicate that work on her ash glaze researches had already commenced before she established her own workshop at Coleshill in 1925.[72]

At the time that Pleydell-Bouverie began her research there was little information available as a guide, a situation that she referenced many years later:

> 'What you want,' said a collector at one of our early shows in London, 'is a book called *Manures for Fruit Trees* by A.B. Griffiths'. I bought the book; and it was my bible for many years until I realised that curiosity and a resilient attitude towards unpleasant shocks were of more use in the making of stoneware glazes than a wagon load of analyses.[73]

In their book *Science and Civilisation in China*, Rose Kerr and Nigel Wood make the point regarding Leach's development of oriental glazes, that with his background of travelling, living, and working in China and Japan 'he was able to make informed guesses on how numerous Sung and earlier glazes had been constructed, and how the wares had been

70. Henry Hammond, 'Kilmington Manor – a Sketch', CSC 1980, p.15.
71. Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, 'A Chance Account', CSC 1980, p.16.
72. Letter from Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie to Matsubayashi Tsurunosuke, dated 12th Oct. 1924, MF Archive (asahi050-028). In Maezaki, ECCT, 2011.
73. Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, 'A Chance Account', CSC 1980, p.16.

made, decorated and fired'.[74] The authors further state that 'Leach was far from being a chemist and he worked from observation, experience, intuition and insight, rather than from direct chemical analysis'. In the 1920s, when Leach and Pleydell-Bouverie were establishing their workshops and researching these glazes, such chemical analyses were unavailable. It was only in the last quarter of the twentieth century that they became available as a consequence of research by several specialists, both in China and in the West.[75]

Ashes from various species of wood and plants were common components of the classic Chinese glazes, including celadon and Chün (Jun). In the opening article of a special feature on Celadon glazes published in the *Studio Potter* in 1998, Zhang Fukang stated that:

> Chemical analysis indicates that all of the high-fired glazes used in ancient Chinese ceramics fall into two categories: the lime glaze and lime-alkali glaze. Both were prepared by mixing limestone, wood ash and porcelain stone. The difference is that the former use more limestone and wood ash than the latter.[76]

In 1928 Norah Braden, who had gone to study and work at St Ives in 1925, joined Pleydell-Bouverie at Coleshill. Apart from occasional visits back to Sussex to see her mother she stayed for eight years. At the time of her arrival in Coleshill, initially to make a stoneware floor for the kiln at her Sussex studio, Braden had more artistic training than Pleydell-Bouverie. Prior to working at St Ives she had already spent three years studying book illustration at the Central School of Arts and Crafts (1919–21) and a further three at the Royal College of Art, initially studying painting, before changing to pottery. Her arrival at St Ives was preceded by glowing reports of her talents in a reference from Sir William Rothenstein, painter, and Principal of the Royal College of Art (1920–1935).

At Coleshill the gardeners and woodsmen collected cuttings from trees and shrubs on the estate, which were used by Pleydell-Bouverie in her glazes. It was the wide variety of vegetation available to her that allowed for her extensive research. These included: box, which produced a smoky green glaze; holly and hawthorn, which gave blues; laurustinus, a particularly subtle blue; larch, walnut and apple, which gave white and creamy matt glazes,

74. Rose Kerr and Nigel Wood, *Science and Civilisation in China*, Volume V:12, Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp.776.
75. Ibid., p.778.
76. Zhang Fukang, 'Longquan Celadon', *Studio Potter*, Vol. 27, No. 1, Dec. 1998, p.33.

and scotch pine, which gave a type of tenmoku glaze.[77] Pleydell-Bouverie also made use of what she describes as 'the kiln-burnt wood ash' in her glazes.[78] This wide variety of wood and other vegetation would not have been available to many potters, certainly not to Leach in west Cornwall.

When the Australian potter Ivan McMeekin (1920–1993) returned home in 1952, having spent three years at Cardew's pottery in Wenford Bridge, he set about establishing the factors that had contributed to the qualities he so admired in the pots produced during the Sung dynasty in China. In a 1993 article on his research on the salient features of the Sung potters' technique, McMeekin included four factors that he had identified.[79]

The first of these concerned the importance of the use of locally occurring raw materials. McMeekin quoted Leach to illustrate this point: 'Contact with the source in nature of his clay, pigment and glaze materials gives a potter more control and scope for the taking advantage of the variations which nature always offers.'[80] The character of the raw materials was responsible for the unique characteristics of the classic Chinese pottery produced in each different area.

McMeekin continued: 'The second feature of the Oriental technique to emerge was that the pots were nearly all fired in wood burning kilns, in saggars. […] In this technique, it is the kiln that is key to colour and texture. Chemical composition has to be right, but it is to no avail unless the kilning is right.'

The third feature McMeekin identified was that there was no mention of an initial biscuit firing in the literature in relation to the Sung wares. He noted that at St Ives and Wenford Bridge the majority of the pots were biscuited to about 1000°C which was, he says, a Japanese tradition. Through the elimination of the biscuit firing stage McMeekin found that the necessary increase in the amount of clay that had to be incorporated into glazes, when applied to raw ware rather than to biscuit fired pots 'changed both the characteristics of the glaze layer applied and the fired colour and quality of the glazes. It seemed that the

77. *Crafts*, No. 19, March/April 1976, p.15.
78. Letter from Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie to Bernard Leach, 29th June 1930, LA/CSC, (LA2500).
79. Ivan McMeekin, 'In his Own Words', published posthumously in *Ceramics Art and Perception*, Issue 13, 1993, pp.61–65.
80. Leach, *A Potter's Book* (1973 edition), p.43.

increase in clay brought with it something of the soft, luminous, semi-transparent quality of the Chinese glazes'.

The fourth factor that McMeekin identified was that the Chinese pots had been mostly thrown on stick wheels. It is relevant to consider Pleydell-Bouverie's methodology as it related to each of these factors and therefore the likelihood of her achieving similar qualities to those of Sung wares. Firstly, as well as wood for firing and sources of ash for her glazes available on the family estate, there were also several deposits of suitable clays nearby. These included 'an Oxford clay full of mussel shells, an ochre such as was used by the Romans, and two other clays yielded by the hill and by the village'.[81] We see therefore that the vast the majority of the materials that Pleydell-Bouverie used were sourced locally.

Secondly, as regards woodfiring in saggars, Pleydell-Bouverie seems to have placed many of her glazed pots in saggars for firing, but not all. In her glaze notebook she comments on one particular glaze made from Scotch pine ash: 'Grey, darkening with more heat. Good for red iron oxide splash or magnetic iron splash (which comes almost purple). But takes around 1400°C. Fires in the open in Chamber 2, but gritty in Chamber 1'.[82] From her correspondence with Leach, we also learn that the saggars were not completely enclosed, which would have allowed some ash and flame on the glazes.[83]

Thirdly, as regards single firing, the pots in the first chamber of the kiln were glazed and there is reference to the second chamber being used for biscuit firing and the firing of planters, which were once fired. Her recipes do however include some glazes for applying to raw pots. By raw glazing some pieces she avoided having to biscuit fire all her pots.[84]

Lastly, we know that Pleydell-Bouverie worked on at least two types of wheels; one of which was a Japanese stick wheel as referred to by McMeekin. So it would appear that she had most, if not all of the conditions in place, which would have enabled her to achieve qualities as close to the original Sung wares as possible.

81. *Crafts*, March/April 1976, p.15.
82. Reproduced in CSC 1980, p.25.
83. Letter from Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie to Bernard Leach, 15th Aug. 1928, LA/CSC, (LA2493).
84. Letter from Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie to Matsubayashi Tsurunosuke, 10th June 1927, MF Archive (asahi050-016). In Maezaki, ECCT, 2011.

In a lecture delivered at Edinburgh School of Art in November 1938, Cardew explained that:

> A glaze is not to be judged only by its hardness and durability, its colour and surface, but above all by its depth, and the 'Kindness' of its quality. This explains why many modern potters adhere so firmly to ancient and traditional methods of firing – using wood, for instance, which seems to give glaze more life and variation… Depth of glaze also involves the very important principle of the relationship of the glaze to the body, that is, the clay. … the melting point of a glaze should be as near as is practicable to the fusing point of the clay, and should overlap the vitrification point of the clay.[85]

In recommending raw glazing he stated: 'This ensures that the clay contributes to the glaze, and co-operates with it to the maximum effect; and the nearer the clay is taken to the point of fusion, the more that it will contribute to the depth and quality of the glaze.'

Amongst the contemporary work Cardew illustrated in his lecture were two pots by Norah Braden and one by Pleydell-Bouverie, as well as pieces by Leach, Hamada, and Staite Murray. He showed Pleydell-Bouverie's piece – which he described as 'A Pot for Flowers – olive-grey and bronze, splashed with red' as 'another good example of glaze quality', after one of Hamada's, which he explained was 'a good example of quality and kindness of glaze'. Cardew commented further on Pleydell-Bouverie's work that: 'She has made a special study of stoneware glazes made from wood-ash (which is the traditional Chinese and Japanese material) and has found that the ash of European woods produces results as interesting though slightly different', adding significantly that 'of all the English potters, she has perhaps gone furthest in the cultivation of glaze quality.'

At the time that this lecture was presented Pleydell-Bouverie was coming to the end of the woodfire phase of her career. Norah Braden had left Coleshill in 1936, but visited during holidays from her teaching. It is not known how often, if at all, Pleydell-Bouverie fired her kiln during the three years between Braden's departure and the start of the Second World War. But it was not just Pleydell-Bouverie's practice that altered dramatically as a result of war; the dynamics of the group of studio potters who has been the main players in the interwar years also changed. Norah Braden made few pots after she left Coleshill. Staite Murray who had visited relatives in Rhodesia in 1939 was stranded there when war broke

85. Michael Cardew, 'Modern English Potters', Lecture delivered at Edinburgh College of Art, 25th Nov. 1938, text reproduced in the online publication *Interpreting Ceramics*, Issue 6, 2005.

out and decided to stay. He never made pots again. Cardew left for Africa in 1942 to take up his first post there. And Leach, further to the publication of *A Potter's Book* in 1940, and its subsequent worldwide success, went on to become the best known potter in the world in the following decades.

The most often quoted statement about Pleydell-Bouverie's work is taken from a letter that she wrote to Leach in 1930. It was written in response to a letter and card from Leach and discussion of developments in his work as well as that of Cardew, Braden and Pleydell-Bouverie herself. In the letter she described the essence of what she sought to achieve in her work:

> At the moment I don't think glazes can, short of absolute under-firing, be too matt. I find myself almost hating shiny surfaces. I want my pots to make people think, not of the Chinese, but of things such as pebbles and shells and birds' eggs and the stones over which moss grows. Flowers stand out of them more pleasantly, so it seems to me. And that seems to matter most. Probably this is largely a complex caused by the eternal: 'Why do you make Chinese pots?' I see the obvious pitfalls of dullness and sleepiness into which we fall, but even so that seems to me better than all the mutton fat and glitter. Don't run away with the idea that I want to imitate stones and pebbles, or make flowers out of fishbone. But I do want the reaction of someone who sees flowers in my pots to be: 'That looks natural'. And it isn't so with shiny pots, as a rule.[86]

The different viewpoints expressed in this statement are worth considering. Pleydell-Bouverie's aversion to shiny glazes is probably describing her feelings about her own work, rather than to in pottery in general, as she remarked in the same letter: 'I don't think Michael [Cardew] will do salt glaze; he isn't attracted much; I don't think salt glaze is shiny enough for him.' Yet she admired Cardew's work.

Glazes in Pleydell-Bouverie's sober, muted colour ranges would not have been successful had they been overly shiny, particularly on the type of reductive forms that she made. In striving to achieve tones and surfaces redolent of natural objects she wanted to create pots that when considered in their entirety – colour, glaze, surface texture, and form – could be likened to forms and surfaces found in nature. She did not wish to replicate either the Sung wares that were her inspiration, or the natural objects that influenced the kind of surfaces that she wanted to achieve, but aimed to capture the essence of both.

86. Letter from Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie to Bernard Leach, 29th June 1930, LA/CSC (LA2500).

Pleydell-Bouverie was considering the forms as they should be when their function was complete, rather than as objects to be appreciated in their own right. To be fully appreciated vases, which were intended to hold flowers, would only be considered complete when they contained flowers, viewed as a harmonious and natural whole. The flowers were to be considered and seen as an integral part of the overall concept. Her preference in what she was seeking in her work was understatement rather than any desire to make her pots stand out and draw attention to themselves. Pleydell-Bouverie's work was devoid of unnecessary embellishment and was in this sense completely in tune with the principles of the modernist movement.

Daniel de Montmollin, the renowned French potter and authority on glazes and glaze formulation wrote of 'the art of ash [glaze research]':

> For those who engage in it, the result is a renewal that very soon achieves an interest far beyond a simple liking for old-fashioned methods. […] the potter is, very soon, going to discover that things that seemed so simple to begin with belong in fact to a universe of immense complexity.[87]

In the introduction to the first of two articles by Pleydell-Bouverie published in *Ceramic Review* in 1970, we get an insight into her motivation for her continuing research in this area. She was then aged seventy-five and had been engaged in ash glaze research for some forty-five years. She cited as a possible reason for using wood or vegetable ash in a glaze that 'the potter has a little spare time and an inquisitive nature, and that access to a tree or bush that is to be cut down and burned makes him wonder what the ash would do in a kiln'.[88] Pleydell-Bouverie also believed that: 'The point of using ashes at all, […] is that, particularly in reduction, they do sometimes produce textures that can be interesting, unusual and, with luck, even beautiful. But not always. By no means always.'[89]

Experiments in wood ash glazes can be notoriously unpredictable as results can vary widely from batch to batch, even when the same species of wood is used. Factors such as the proportions of minerals that the particular species of tree from which the ash was obtained

87. Daniel de Montmollin, *The Practice of Stoneware Glazes – minerals, rocks, ashes*, La Revue de la Céramique et du Verre, 2005, p.164.
88. Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, 'Technical Notes', *Ceramic Review*, numbers 5 and 6, 1970. Reproduced in CC 1986.
89. Ibid.

absorbed from the soil in which it was grown, can have an effect on results. Climatic conditions and which part of a tree is used are additional variables. That many tests yielded disappointing results is evident from comments that Pleydell-Bouverie included in her research records, among them, 'Bad. Like black boot polish at about 1240°C.'[90]

Using the materials that were available to her locally, combinations primarily consisting of ash derived from different species of wood and plants, and clay, Pleydell-Bouverie was using the same basic ingredients as those used in the classic Chinese glazes, but sought results that satisfied her aesthetic sense of what was appropriate for her work. In his book *Ceramics*, art historian Philip Rawson stated:

> Glaze depth undoubtedly intensifies the emotive value of a colour. […] A really deep glaze, however thick and unctuous as in Sung Lung-ch'üan and Chün, seems so to speak, to draw the attention within its own translucent thickness. Its depth gives us a sense of the internal mutual reflections of its glaze particles with their different colours; the eye is not forced to accept the outer surface as a coloured sheen.[91]

Some of Pleydell-Bouverie's glazes have this quality. There is no feeling that this is a separate surface coating, the glaze and body appear as one. Her pots were fired to particularly high temperatures. From her notebooks there is evidence that temperatures of up to 1300°C were reached in the first chamber of her kiln and 1350–1400°C in the second. This would have contributed to greater integration of glaze and the clay body beneath.

On arguably her finest pieces Pleydell-Bouverie relied on the subtle tones and variations that were inherent in her ash glazes for surface interest. One process she employed involved blowing 'powdered iron oxide from the bowl of a teaspoon onto the still damp surface of the newly glazed pots'. As Henry Hammond, a long-time friend and regular visitor to Kilmington described: 'When the glaze melted, this concentration of iron produced dark patches in the glaze, introducing changes of colour on what might otherwise have remained a monotonous surface.'[92]

90. Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie's Glaze Notebook in the Craft Study Centre, Farnham, recipe XLIX 1929.
91. Rawson, *Ceramics* (1984 edition), p.135.
92. Henry Hammond, 'A Visit to Kilmington', CC 1986, p.22.

Pigments were sometimes applied as banding. The piece shown in Figure 15 (page 115), demonstrates a unity of form, glaze, and decoration as well as an overall sense of restraint. The subtle tones and matt surface, combined with full natural curves and well-balanced proportions, are strongly reminiscent of natural forms.

What may at first appear to be a uniform coating of glaze in Pleydell-Bouverie's work is not in fact so, and on closer examination it is possible to see variations and irregularities that resulted from her use of unrefined, locally occurring materials, which contribute to the overall pleasing visual impact. On the piece *Roc's Egg* (Figure 14, page 113) there are flecks and speckles of slightly darker tones within the glaze, resulting in a sense of depth and luminosity. In common with some of her contemporaries, Pleydell-Bouverie often left areas towards the bases of her pots unglazed. This allowed the clay body to be seen and contrasted with the glazed area, its qualities emphasised and appreciated in keeping with the concept of 'truth to materials', rather than hidden under an entire coating of glaze. On *Roc's Egg* the area of exposed clay at the foot lets us see the thickness of the glaze. The unevenness of the line and thick dribbles adding to the overall feeling of naturalness.

Henry Hammond described another example of Pleydell-Bouverie's work on which this feature is to be seen: 'There is a bowl […] which I especially like, which has an egg-shell blue glaze made from hawthorn ash: the blue-green glaze sings out against the iron-red blush that steals along the edge of the foot ring.'[93] Hammond may have been referring to the bowl illustrated in Figure 13, (page 111), where an 'iron-red blush' is evident at the line of demarcation between glaze and exposed clay body, a characteristic that is caused when the impact of the glaze extends slightly beyond the area of the form that it covers.

In two other large bottles/vases illustrated here (Figures 17 and 18, page 119) there is more variation of colour on the surface, and evidence of oxides splashed on the glaze resulting in visual highlights on the fired surface. On these forms there is a gentle flowing in the glaze, which contributes to the overall organic natural effect, as well as slowing the eye as form and surface are studied. Two small bottles (Figure16, page 117) display further variation in the range of Pleydell-Bouverie's glazes. The bottle on the left has a glaze which looks as though it is still molten and about to flow off the surface of the pot, such is the sense of

93. Henry Hammond, 'A Visit to Kilmington', CC 1986, p.22.

movement it exhibits. The glazed surface of this piece is more complex than those of the other pieces shown here, with tones ranging from pale cream/yellow to shades of brown, with glossy blue and black highlights. The second bottle has a more stable glaze, showing milky white where it has been applied thickly. From the horizontal bands that are evident, it looks as though the glaze may have been applied by brushing. Both pots have areas of the rich red clay body exposed at their bases.

Two bowls illustrated (Figures 11, and 13, pages 109 and 111) have different glaze qualities from the bottles and vases. One has a pale creamy ivory-like coloured glaze; the second, probably one of Pleydell-Bouverie's best-known pieces, has a cloudy blue green glaze. The most striking feature of these, in addition to the quality of glaze is the arbitrary crackle effect which adds an extra dimension to the surface, contributing to a sense of depth of glaze. The forms are closely based on classic Chinese bowls, the crackle glaze reminiscent of Sung dynasty Guan ware, which Nigel Wood, in his book on Chinese glazes, attributes to the 'glazes' contracting more than the clay body they are covering during the last 300°C of cooling – rather as surface mud dries, shrinks and cracks more than the ground beneath'.[94] A third bowl, gently-curved (Figure 12, page 111) has a delicate cream-coloured rose ash glaze that contrasts with the reddish brown of the clay body, visible at the foot.

The materials from which Pleydell-Bouverie's pots were made were treated in a direct and honest manner, plain to see and not hidden under an all-over glaze. George Wingfield Digby, well-known collector of studio pottery, observed of her work that:

> Using a wide range of vegetable ashes, she produced some of the loveliest glaze effects known to stoneware pottery, with their soft luminous depths and matt surfaces in varied tones […]. These ash glazes worked out with great resourcefulness, have given to modern pottery in England a range of possibilities probably unparalleled elsewhere.[95]

The first pot that Wingfield Digby and his wife bought together was (in 1935) was the vase shown in Figure 15 (page 115). Although only 27 cm in height, it has remarkable presence and is typical of the best work that Pleydell-Bouverie produced. Much of her work was very

94. Wood, *Chinese Glazes*, 1999, p.85.
95. Quoted in, Tony Birks and Cornelia Wingfield Digby, *Bernard Leach, Hamada & Their Circle from the Wingfield Digby Collection*, Phaidon Christies, 1990, p.139.

small, with some pots no more than 5–7cm in height. These pieces were no doubt intended as glaze tests. However many of them, given as gifts or sold, ended up in prestigious collections including that of Wingfield Digby.

Having either directly or indirectly influenced Pleydell-Bouverie to embark upon what would become a lifetime of research into ash glazes, Leach later acknowledged her expertise in this area in *A Potter's Book*. In Chapter VI, 'Pigments and Glazes', under the heading 'Vegetable Ashes', he wrote that 'Miss Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, who between 1930–40 used various sorts of wood-ashes in her stoneware glazes at Coleshill, divides them into five groups according to colour and quality'.[96] The remainder of this section of the book includes results of Pleydell-Bouverie's findings on glaze tests using different types of wood and plant materials. Some of her recipes are included in glaze charts, alongside those of Hamada and Kawai. In a section on 'The effects of different kinds of wood for glost firing' Leach reports on the results of 'Miss Bouverie's' experience', quoting from her letter dated 6th December 1937, in which she responded to his technical questions on this subject.[97]

**The reception of Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie's work 1925–1939**

The work Pleydell-Bouverie and Braden produced during their eight-year partnership at Coleshill is similar in that they mostly used the same glazes. However, their forms were somewhat different and their work can be distinguished by those who familiarise themselves with their methods. Cardew described their partnership at Coleshill:

> These were their most productive years. The wood-fired kiln was in constant use, and they perfected their range of stoneware glazes most of which contained one or other of the various wood ashes which they had obtained from the surrounding countryside. They used these glazes to great effect in a series of noble jars, bowls and pots. During those years they were exhibiting regularly at the London galleries, the critics were praising their pioneering work and the great museums were buying some of their best examples.[98]

Though she was not dependent on income from the sale of her work, Pleydell-Bouverie seems to have been fairly enthusiastic and ambitious when it came to participating in exhibitions. It was in this way that her work came to the attention of collectors and critics.

96. Leach, *A Potter's Book* (1973 edition), pp.161–3.
97. Letter from Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie to Bernard leach, LA/CSC (LA3282).
98. Cardew, 'St. Ives and Coleshill Days', CSC 1980, p.12.

As early as 1929 her work was included in many prestigious exhibitions and was on sale in some of the best galleries and shops in London and the provinces. During the years that she and Braden worked together, they had joint exhibitions at the Paterson Gallery, the Lefevre Gallery, the Brygos Gallery and Colnaghi's. The first exhibition at Muriel Rose's influential 'The Little Gallery' in 1929 featured work by both Braden and Pleydell-Bouverie.[99]

Critics from *The Times*, *Apollo*, and *Artwork* reviewed their work. That their work received the attention of writers for such prominent publications at this early stage in their careers was evidence of the standard that the two potters had attained. The following is from an eight-page *Artwork* review by W.A. Thorpe of a 1930 exhibition:

> The idiom which begins in form is carried on into glazes, the most experimental and original aspect of the work of Miss Bouverie and Miss Braden. The glazes are original because they open the art of pottery to a ceramic expression of English sentiment […]. The chief function of pots or vases […] is to hold flowers; and flowers grow in the landscape. The pot which is to support them should be a bit of landscape brought indoors turned off in the round […]. Miss Bouverie and Miss Braden do not try to copy the rich Sung glazes, but limit themselves to a low-tone scale of white, grey-green, brown, yellowish-brown and the like – the colours of stones and grass and burnt fields and overgrown pools. This is both good naturalism and good decoration.[100]

These comments are indicative not only of the high standing of pottery at this period, but that it was being critiqued in a manner similar to painting and sculpture. The critic clearly understood the potters' aims and considered their work in the broader context, not just as functional objects and containers. The analysis encapsulates the aims that Pleydell-Bouverie had for her work.

Another 1930 review by critic and art historian Charles Marriott published in *The Times*, singled out Pleydell-Bouverie's glazes and Braden's decoration for praise:

> Unfailing good taste and a steady technical progress are shown in the exhibition of stoneware by Miss D.K.N. Braden and Miss K. Pleydell-Bouverie at the Paterson Gallery, 5 Old Bond Street. As compared with the work of Mr Murray and Mr Leach, their shapes are a little hard and unemotional, but in colour and surface quality they leave little to be desired. Of the two, Miss Pleydell-Bouverie seems to be more

99. Barley Roscoe, 'Artist Craftswomen Between the Wars', in *Women and Craft*, Gillian Elinor, et al. (Editors.), Virago Press, 1987, p.142. See also the Introduction to *A Potter's Life*, by the same author, CC 1986, p.10.
100. W. A.Thorpe, 'English Stoneware Pottery by Miss K. Pleydell-Bouverie and Miss D.K.N. Braden', *Artwork*, VI, Winter 1930, pp.257–265.

> expert in glazes […] while Miss Braden has a special gift for brush decoration […]. The whole exhibition gives the impression of soundness. Emotional awakening will come.[101]

Though somewhat patronising, the review was nonetheless positive in tone and was probably intended to encourage the two young, and relatively inexperienced potters. It is evidence that Pleydell-Bouverie's and Braden's work was being taken seriously.

Work by Pleydell-Bouverie, Braden, Leach and Cardew was included in the exhibition *Modern Japanese and English Handicrafts*, shown at the Harvard Society for Contemporary Art in January 1930. The work had been selected by Yanagi during a visit to England the previous year. The exhibition was also shown at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Cleveland Museum.[102] Work by all four potters was shown again in the British Pavilion at the 1937 Paris Exhibition (*Exposition international des arts et techniques appliqués à la vie modern*).[103]

In the extensive review of the work of Pleydell-Bouverie and Braden published in *Artwork* in 1930 cited above, W. A. Thorpe remarked that:

> Chinese pottery will answer to any interior, and for that reason may be claimed as a universal pottery […] For that reason, too, the modern stoneware potters who start from the Chinese have the best chance of making an art of to-day, and what is more an art for to-morrow.

This may account for at least part of the reason for the success of Pleydell-Bouverie's work of the interwar years. Though strongly inspired by classical Sung wares she succeeded in creating forms that reflected the tenets of Modernism. There is an austerity about her forms, but not a cold austerity – simplicity in surface treatment. There is no unnecessary or frivolous decoration. Her muted shades do not shout out or distract attention from the flowers placed in her vases, or from nearby art works in domestic interiors.

101. From a review (by art critic Charles Marriott) published in *The Times*, 22nd May 1930. Quoted by Barley Roscoe in her introduction to *A Potter's Life,* CC 1986, pp.10–11.
102. Tanya Harrod, *The Last Sane Man Michael Cardew Modern Pots, Colonialism and the Counterculture,* Yale University Press, 2012, p.90.
103. Ibid., p.122.

### 3.4: The capacity of Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie's work to evoke a sense of quietness

While the expression 'quiet touch of the flame' used in relation to woodfiring could generally be interpreted as meaning the effects achievable on clay or glaze surfaces through contact with flame and flyash during firing, in Pleydell-Bouverie's work this is not necessarily the case. The glaze surfaces for which she is renowned were not achieved through direct contact with flame and ash, as her pots were generally fired in saggars, albeit that they may not have been fully enclosed in them. The quiet effects resulted from the woodfiring cycle – the slow increase in temperature and slow cooling, the cycles of oxidation and reduction, and the manner in which the glazes matured and were affected by these conditions. The characteristic that the process of woodfiring contributed to her work was the rich and lustrous quality of the glazes.

The *Things of Beauty Growing* catalogue contains illustrations of three 12th/13th century bowls. Two are from the Leach's source collection now in the Crafts Study Centre, Farnham, and one was formerly in his private collection. Two are Chinese; one is Korean celadon. These bowls immediately precede examples by Braden and Pleydell-Bouverie (Figures 12 and 13, page 111). The influence is obvious. The bowls by Braden and Pleydell-Bouverie compare favourably with the classic wares, not least in their quiet, calm presence. At the Cambridge showing of the exhibition, there was much to attract/distract the attention. The case in which these bowls were displayed was positioned in the centre of one of the galleries, and provided a welcome contrast of mood. Though unobtrusive and uncomplicated, the bowls were quite powerful in terms of their capacity for contemplation as pure abstract forms.

There is frequent reference to quietness in discussion of Pleydell-Bouverie's pots. In a tribute shortly after her death, Barley Roscoe, who had curated the 1980 Craft Study Centre retrospective exhibition, wrote of a visit she had paid to Kilmington Manor some years earlier: 'I was shown some of her own pots and bowls from Coleshill days […] quiet, simple shapes with soft, subtle glazes, with an almost luminous quality.'[104] The use of the word luminous here is most descriptive of a quality that is evident in many of Pleydell-Bouverie's pots, particularly some of her tall bulbous bottle and vase forms.

104. Barley Roscoe, 'Beano', *Crafts*, No. 75, July/Aug., 1985, p.38.

Another description, by potter and author Phil Rogers, made reference to 'the quiet, understated beauty of her pots'. Paul Rice wrote that 'Her pots, quiet in the extreme, have a warmth and charm rarely, if ever, equalled'.[105] The vases, bottles, and bowls by Pleydell-Bouverie included in this study are all glazed in her signature ash glazes. The surfaces are smooth and matt, subdued, but not dull. The monochrome colours are natural in range and at the quieter end of the spectrum. These tranquil and unobtrusive colours can be seen in nature and are of nature. The forms too are derived from nature. There are no sharp angles, or abrupt changes in direction. To contemplate one of Pleydell-Bouverie's pots with muted but deep-toned surface there is nothing ostentatious to distract or draw immediate attention.

As will be demonstrated later, Hanssen Pigott's work from the late 1980s has been responsible for the viewing of pottery in a different way; of becoming aware of the potential of pots to convey a sense of quietness and contemplation. She achieved this through grouping pots in arrangements. Pleydell-Bouverie's pots, made sixty years earlier, are similarly capable of conveying this sense. Quietness and the capacity to evoke surfaces and forms to be found in nature were qualities that she wished to achieve in her pots. In observing pieces such as *Roc's Egg* (Figure 14, page 113) and *Vase* (Figure 15, page 115), it becomes clear that she succeeded in these aims.

Glaze effects alone would not have been sufficient for Pleydell-Bouverie's work to be so highly regarded by her contemporaries, particularly in the first phase of her career. It was the combination of glaze quality, the appropriateness of the forms to which they were applied, and the overall impact achieved on glazes and clay bodies through firing with wood that distinguished her early work from that of her contemporaries. In her best work the smooth, unctuous, luminous surfaces of the restrained yet powerful forms evoke a sense of calmness and tranquillity.

### 3.5: Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie's work compared to that of her contemporaries

Roger Fry is widely regarded as having provided the critical frame of reference for the appreciation of the work of the early studio potters by discussing the attributes of medieval English as well as classic Chinese Tang and Sung wares in his writing from as early as

105. Rice, *British Studio Ceramics*, 2002, p.47.

1914.[106] Friend and fellow member of the Bloomsbury Group, Clive Bell (1881–1964), also helped reposition pottery in the context of contemporary art. In Britain formalist art theory was developed by Fry and Bell. In his 1914 book *Art*, Bell explained the aesthetic theory of 'significant form', that form itself can convey emotion. He stated that 'no one ever doubted that a Sung pot or a Romanesque church was as much an expression of emotion as any picture that was ever painted'.[107] This further endorsed the status of pottery and its potential as an art form.

Public interest in contemporary pottery subsequently grew as a result of the writings of other critics. 1924 saw the publication of *English Pottery* by Bernard Rackham and Herbert Read, both at that time working at the Victoria and Albert Museum. In the introduction they stated that: 'Sculpture, whether glyptic or plastic, had from the first an imitative intention, and is to that extent less free for the expression of the aesthetic sense than pottery, which may be regarded as plastic art in its most abstract form.'[108]

In his book '*The Meaning of Art* published in 1931, Read again championed the qualities of pottery stating that 'Pottery is at once the simplest and the most difficult of all arts. It is the simplest because it is the most elemental; it is the most difficult because it is the most abstract'.[109]

Although Pleydell-Bouverie's vessels were made with function in mind, her best work succeeds at another level – as pure simple forms with subdued, natural surfaces that allow them to be considered and contemplated as abstract forms. Pleydell-Bouverie's work was of its own time, to be considered in the context of inter-war years Modernism.

Pleydell-Bouverie as well as some of her 'circle' were dismissive of the commercially successful work of Charles (1882–1971) and Nell (1892–1967) Vyse, who were also influenced by Sung Dynasty pottery. The Vyses achieved a very high level of technical accuracy in producing both the glazes and forms of classical Chinese wares. In her

106. Roger Fry, 'The Art of Pottery in England', *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, Vol. 24, No 132, March 1914, pp.330–335.
107. Clive Bell, *Art,* Chatto and Windus, 1914, p.58.
108. Bernard Rackham and Herbert Read, *English Pottery, its Development from Early Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (first published in 1924), republished 1972 by EP Publishing, p.4.
109. Herbert Read, '*The Meaning of Art*, Faber (first published in 1931), 1977 edition, pp.41–42.

correspondence with Leach, Pleydell-Bouverie refers to an exhibition of the Vyse's work as being 'as usual, competently commercial and to me not interesting'.[110] It was, she considered cold and lacking in feeling while at the same time being technically proficient. Cardew observed of Vyse's work, 'somehow the pots were too perfect; you longed for some saving touch of the unpredictable.'[111] The Vyse's pots were, in the opinion of the Leach circle, lacking in individuality and cold in their technical perfection, compared to the qualities that they strove to achieve in their own work.

Pleydell-Bouverie was one of the earliest women involved in pottery with an independent practice, in the twentieth century in the West. Comparison can be made with another early practitioner, Denise Wren (1891–1979). In the preface to *The Oxshott Pottery – Denise and Henry Wren*, a booklet published to coincide with the first retrospective exhibition of the Wrens' work, Margot Coatts points out that 'Denise Wren can justifiably be called the first independent woman studio potter in England'.[112]

Coatts commented that the Wrens were separated ideologically as well as practically from Leach and his group. Wren worked in earthenware from the time she established her workshop with her husband Henry in 1920, until 1939. They did not draw inspiration from classical Oriental ceramics like so many of their contemporaries. The glazes that Wren used were brightly coloured and the forms often highly decorated. Firing itself was her abiding interest rather than researching the chemistry of glazes. Her first kiln was a gas-fired muffle type, imported from America in 1920. From 1925 to 1968 she was involved in designing, building and selling plans of coke-fired muffle kilns.

Another major difference in the careers of Wren and Pleydell-Bouverie was that Wren was involved in education almost right from the start of her practice. The courses that she ran in her workshop were an important aspect of this. Wren was actively involved in the establishment of the Craftsman Potters Association (CPA) in the mid-1950s. Pleydell-Bouverie was a founder member of the Association and served on its council for several years.

110. Letter from Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie to Bernard Leach, 17th Dec. 1932, LA/CSC (LA2513).
111. Cardew biography, 1989 edition, p.71.
112. Margot Coatts et al., *The Oxshott Pottery – Denise and Henry Wren*, The Crafts Study Centre, Bath, 1984, p.6.

### 3.6: The influence and legacy of Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie's work

In Pleydell-Bouverie's work the forms and glazes should be considered together. Despite the fact that her work is often referenced for her glaze research alone, Pleydell-Bouverie's place in the history of British studio pottery is not just that of a talented glaze chemist. Her best work succeeds because of its unity of form, colour and texture. 'As for shapes,' she wrote in 1930 regarding the forms that she and Norah Braden were then making, 'we don't seek soft, round curves. They happen like that because they're the most natural things for us both to make.'[113]

During the year she spent at St Ives the area of research in which Pleydell-Bouverie would be engaged for the following six decades was established. While research into the glazes of classic Chinese wares had long been a preoccupation of artist potters in the West, it was the extent and range of Pleydell-Bouverie's research that distinguished her practice. The quality of the glazed surfaces that she achieved is evidence of the single-minded determination that was necessary in order to reach such a standard of proficiency in glaze composition.

Research in ash glazes was, as Pleydell-Bouverie stated, one in which 'curiosity and a resilient attitude towards unpleasant shocks' were of more use 'than a wagon load of analyses'.[114] The extent of her research is a testament to the deep interest and accompanying curiosity that she had in the subject, and indicative of the sense of satisfaction that she must have gained from successful tests, that inspired and sustained her further research. Her work described by Phil Rogers as 'the most thorough investigation into the behaviour of wood ashes in modern times',[115] has not been surpassed. Rogers added that Pleydell-Bouverie's work 'has formed the basis and inspiration for much further work by potters all over the world'. Her work in the field of glazes derived from the ash of different woods and plant matter, fired in a large wood-fire kiln inspired by Oriental type kilns, was more extensive than that of any of her contemporaries, including Leach.

Belonging to the generation younger than Pleydell-Bouverie, Eric James Mellon (1925–2014) was involved in research on ash glazes from1965 until the end of his career.[116.]

113. Letter from Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie to Bernard Leach, 29th June 1930, LA/CSC (LA2500).
114. Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, 'A Chance Account', CSC 1980, p.16.
115. Phil Rogers, *Ash Glazes*, A & C Black, 1991, p.18.
116. Eric James Mellon https://sounds.bl.uk/Oral-history/Crafts

Although he does not appear to cite Pleydell-Bouverie's research as an influence, Mellon was no doubt aware of it and would have known her from the early days of the Craftsman Potters Association. Mellon fired his work in an electric kiln and it was highly decorated with figurative designs painted in oxides.

Research into the use of ash from plants in the formulation of glazes has been the subject of at least one PhD thesis in the UK (in 2008).[117] However, this research was focussed on glazes fired at a temperature of 1240°C in an electric kiln. Though Pleydell-Bouverie's research is mentioned briefly in the historical section, it is not cited as a source.

Pleydell-Bouverie, created a particular aesthetic within wood-fired glazed ware. Research into ash glazes is a practice that is continued today by studio potters worldwide. Some of these woodfire their work, others use gas, or oil-fired kilns in which they can carry out reduction firings, which generally result in more interesting effects than the oxidation firings of electric kilns. Some of these potters know of and acknowledge a debt to Pleydell-Bouverie, others may not have heard of her or know of her work. It is likely however that at some stage they will find themselves using a particular recipe or ratio of materials in a recipe that was originally investigated and developed by her, since the results of her research have been so readily and widely available for decades.

Woodfirers today who concentrate on glazed ware do not generally aim to protect their work from direct flame and flyash by packing it in saggars. Instead their interest lies in exploring flyash effects on glazes, which may or may not, already contain a percentage of ash.

Pleydell-Bouverie kept meticulous records of all her glaze tests, and both the recipes and corresponding results are available at the Craft Study Centre. The recipes, almost 500 in total spanning 55 years of experiments, were collated by Pleydell-Bouverie in a single notebook on the occasion of her retrospective exhibition at the Crafts Study Centre in 1980. Over half of these were included in the 1986 publication produced to coincide with another exhibition of her work at the Crafts Study Centre. These recipes include examples for high

117. Carol Metcalfe, *New Ash Glazes from Arable Crop Waste*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Sunderland, 2008.

and medium temperature glazes suitable for firing in reduction, as well as medium and low temperature glazes for firing in an electric kiln. Given this broad range, the recipes are likely to contain something of relevance for most potters with an interest in the subject. Pleydell-Bouverie marked her pots with an incised number for identification of the clay body she used, and a painted code corresponding to the glaze, thus providing the possibility for researchers to match the recipes with examples of fired results.[118]

Although the woodfire stage of her career came to an end eighty years ago, Pleydell-Bouverie's research continued into the 1980s. This later period was focussed on developing glazes appropriate for firing in an oil-fired kiln (1946–1960), and thereafter in an electric kiln. The oil-fired kiln allowed her to continue with reduction firings, which meant that glazes that she had developed at Coleshill could still be used. The firings in the electric kiln were at lower temperatures. For these it was necessary to devise different clay bodies and glaze recipes. The inclusion of frits in the formulae lowered the maturing temperature of these glazes, and the addition of small quantities of metal oxides introduced colour to glazes that might otherwise have been relatively dull, and lacking the richness and depth of those fired in reduction.

It has been said of Richard Batterham's work, much of which is ash-glazed, that 'it references ceramic history, in the understated manner of Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie (whose work he greatly admires)'.[119] Batterham, who studied with Leach at St Ives many years after Pleydell-Bouverie, and later became a close friend, wrote of her work:

> Her warm, deep, but light-hearted and humble generosity is in her pots, and makes them so approachable and lovable. For me this is their over-riding quality, without it the early ash glazes would probably not have come into being, and even if they had, I doubt they would have been noticed if used on unlovely work, just so much tinkling brass.[120]

Another contemporary potter well known for his ash-glazed work is Mike Dodd. He has spoken of the influence of Pleydell-Bouverie, whom he had met when a schoolboy:

118. Notes accompanying an inventory of work by Pleydell-Bouverie held in the Crafts Study Centre Collection, CSC 1980, pp.20–23.
119. *Things of Beauty Growing*, Yale University Press, 2017, p.400.
120. Richard Batterham, 'Beano', CC 1986, p.24.

> Still in my memory [there] was this little bowl with a hawthorn ash glaze on, that was just fatty, deep, with an unusual almost chrome green […] and it just hit me […] I have tried all my life to get that kind of quality in that glaze, and I have never managed it.[121]

Pleydell-Bouverie's work continued to be included in exhibitions. She had solo shows as late as 1974 in Selwood Galleries, Frome, Somerset, and 1976 at the Casson Gallery in London. Her work had, however, experienced what could be described as a period of neglect in the post World War II era, compared to its high level of success in the late 1920s/1930s. A number of different factors could be relevant here. Did her work lose its significance in the decades after it was created? Was there a change of fashion? Was there a change in the style of work collectors were seeking and the potters they were supporting? Was there a change of policy in the work that museums and galleries were collecting? Or was it the fact that Pleydell-Bouverie's work had changed?

With a break of some six years in her practice it was perhaps difficult for Pleydell-Bouverie to regain momentum when she established her new workshop. The fact that Norah Braden had left in 1936 and Pleydell-Bouverie was no longer working in partnership with another potter probably also had an impact. In Coleshill she had used local unrefined raw materials, which contributed to the particular qualities that she achieved in her work during this phase of her practice. As the estate had been sold, it was unlikely that these materials would have been available to her after she moved. While all of these considerations may have been contributing factors, the change over from firing with wood to oil undoubtedly had a significant impact on the glaze quality that Pleydell-Bouverie achieved from the mid-1940s onwards.

There has not been a major retrospective exhibition of Pleydell-Bouverie's work since 1986. Potter Mick Casson referenced the status of her work in a tribute after her death in 1985: 'At their best her pots were generous in form, warm in colour and quite timeless in feeling. Unfashionable now perhaps – but fashions will change and her best pots will endure.'[122] Casson has been proved right. Whereas she was frequently written about in the past only in the context of her association with Leach and Cardew, Pleydell-Bouverie's work is now

121. Mike Dodd quoted in *Michael Cardew and Stoneware Continuity and Change*, by John Edgeler, Cotswolds Living publications, 2008, p.38.
122. Michael Casson, 'Beano – a tribute to Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie', *Crafts*, No. 75, July/Aug. 1985, p.38.

referenced in scholarly discussion around Modernism in the interwar period. Her best pots, in the collections of major public institutions, are regularly shown in survey exhibitions, at least three in 2017/2018.

Pleydell-Bouverie's work was included in *That Continuous Thing: Artists and the Ceramics Studio 1920 – Today* exhibition at Tate St Ives, and also in the *Pioneers* exhibition at Swindon Museum and Art Gallery in Wiltshire, which were both held in Summer 2017. It also featured prominently in *Things of Beauty Growing: British Studio Pottery*. This survey type exhibition had as its theme studio pottery from the early twentieth century to the present, focussing on eight classifications of forms: moon jar, vase, bowl, charger, set, vessel, pot, and monument. A vase and three bowls by Pleydell-Bouverie were included, as well as four bowls by Norah Braden produced during the period that she worked with Pleydell-Bouverie and which were fired in the kiln at Coleshill. The vase by Pleydell-Bouverie was used to illustrate a section-opening page in the catalogue. Made in 1937 it is glazed with a grey box ash glaze (Figure 19, page 117) and was one of the pieces chosen by Michael Cardew for inclusion in the major Crafts Council exhibition *The Maker's Eye* in 1981. Pleydell-Bouverie, it would appear, is now being recognised as a seminal figure within the development of British studio pottery in the twentieth century.

**Conclusion**

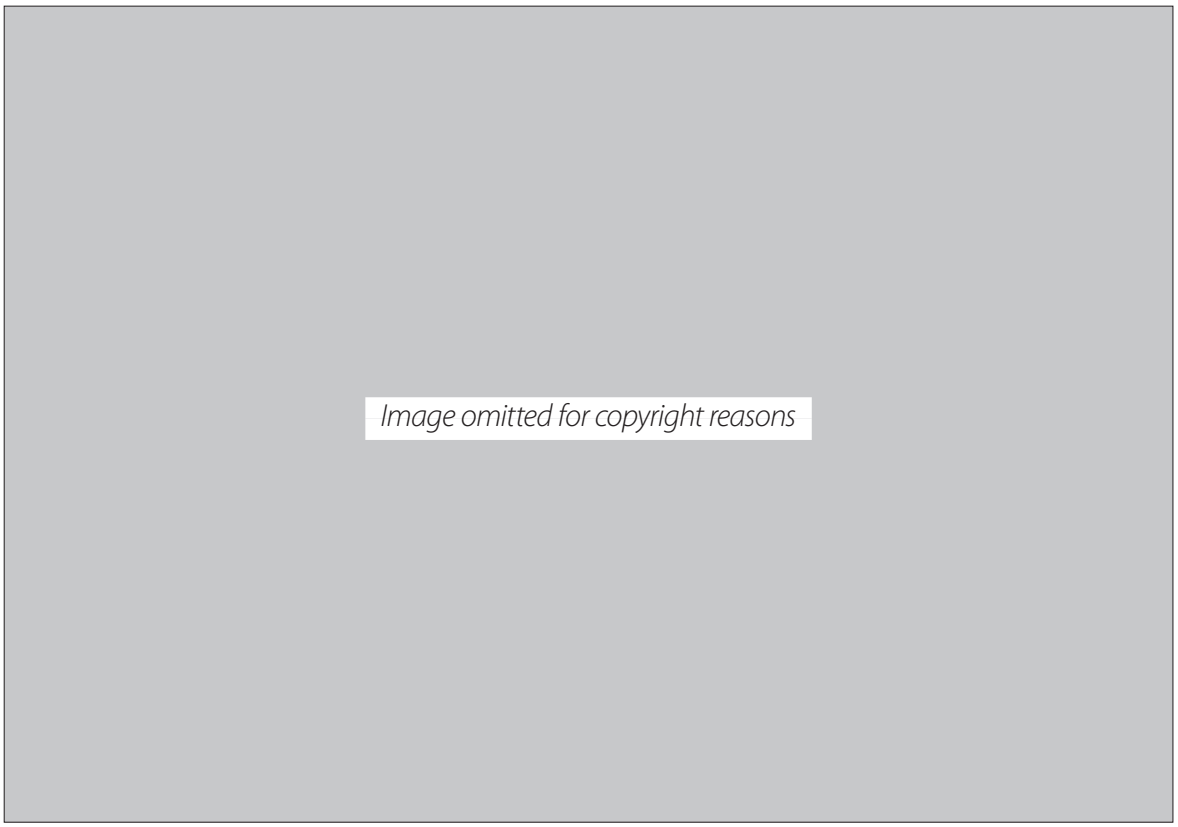
It could be stated that it was that fortuitous Pleydell-Bouverie began her career as an independent potter in 1925, a time that coincided with the revaluation of the status of pottery in relation to the fine arts, a situation that continued throughout the first decade of her practice. The year that she had spent in St Ives saw the publication of Rackham and Read's book on English pottery in which they strongly endorsed pottery. Starting out in her career at such a pivotal moment in the development of studio pottery afforded opportunities to Pleydell-Bouverie that would not have existed earlier, or indeed in the decades afterwards, when pottery was not regarded in such high esteem.

Pleydell-Bouverie's own writings tell of her aspirations for her work, that it should be natural and understated, to compliment but not challenge nature. In an effort to achieve these qualities she worked with locally occurring natural raw materials and took the wares of Sung Dynasty China as her inspiration for both form and glaze quality. The kiln she used

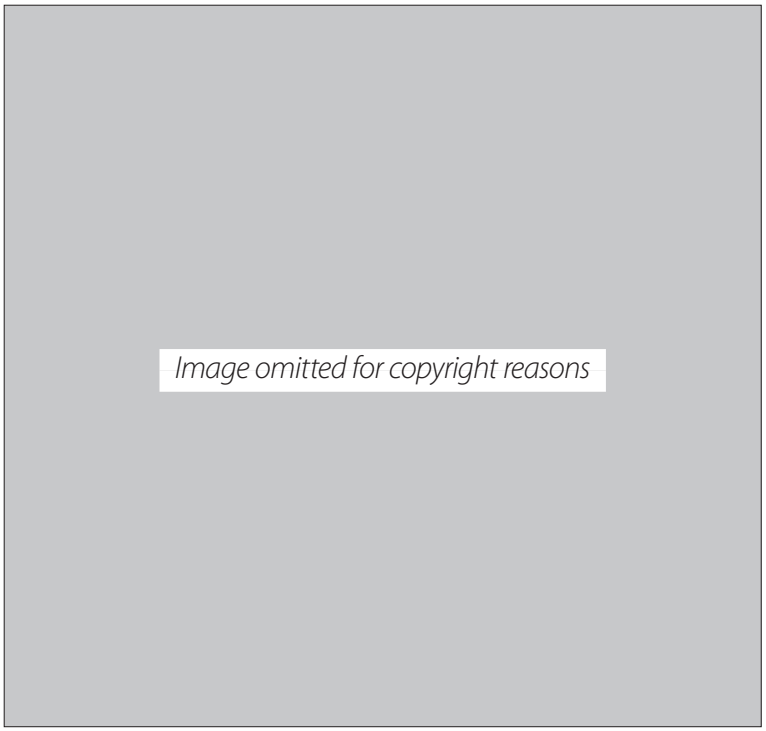
was in some senses a scaled-down version of the massive Chinese kilns in which the Sung wares were fired, as regards thermal mass. Everything was in place to aid her in achieving the effects that she sought. She succeeded in this often enough to result in a body of work which, respected by her peers and collectors alike, has clearly stood the test of time. Pleydell-Bouverie used Oriental technology – tools and kiln type in producing her work, but the majority of her materials were sourced from within a few of miles of her home.

Pleydell-Bouverie made significant contributions to high-temperature glaze research. She achieve glaze qualities that have been favourably compared to those of Chinese Sung Dynasty wares that were her primary inspiration. She did not recreate technically accurately versions of these pots, as others did. Instead she created forms that have a timeless quality. Forms and surfaces combined succeed in commanding attention in a quiet sort of way, and then rewarding that attention with their calming tranquil presence.

# Chapter 4
# Jacqueline Lerat




**19.** Visiting tutor Anne Dangar, centre, with Jacqueline Bouvet (Lerat) at left, and three fellow students at the Centre Artisanal de Poterie et Arts Plastique de Mâcon, in Mâcon, France, Spring 1942. (Image source: *Jacqueline Lerat – Une œœuvre en mouvement*, Éditions La Revue de la Céramique et du Verre, 2010.)

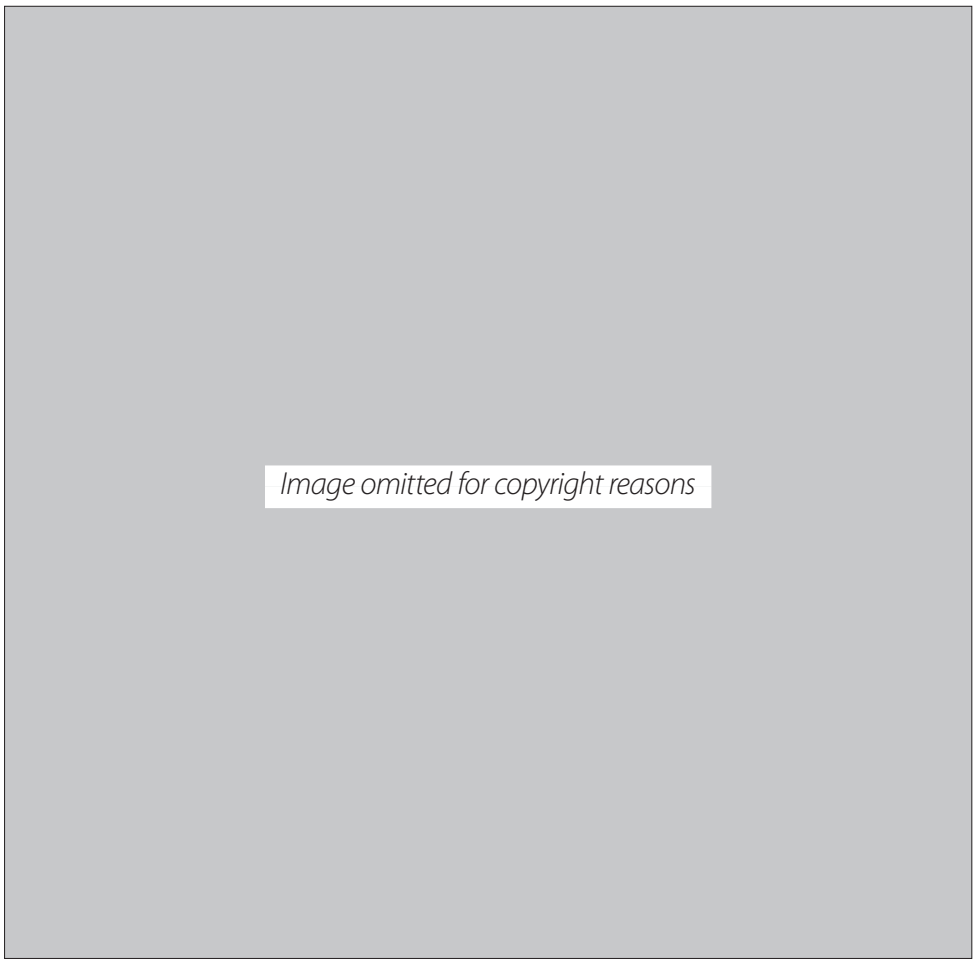



**20.** The *four de Sèvres* (Sèvres kiln) built for Paul Beyer at his studio in La Borne, France in 1942. This studio was initially rented by Jean and Jacqueline Lerat in 1945 and bought by them in 1949. They continued to fire their work in this kiln until they moved to the city of Bourges in 1955. (Photograph: Robert Sanderson, 2014.)

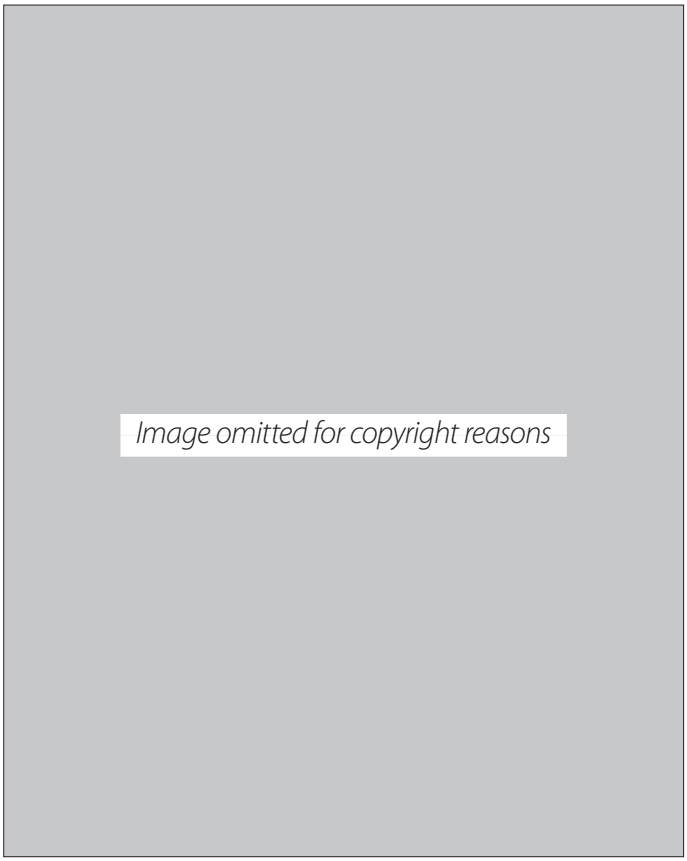

**21.** Jean and Jacqueline Lerat's *four de Sèvres* (Sèvres kiln), built at their studio in Bourges, France in 1955. Jacqueline Lerat continued to fire her work in this kiln until 2008. (Photograph: Robert Sanderson, 2014.)


**22.** *Fontaine* (drinking water container), by Marie Talbot (1814–1874), bearing the inscription '*fait par Marie Talbot*' (made by Marie Talbot). (Image source: Musée de la Poterie, La Borne, Cher, France.)

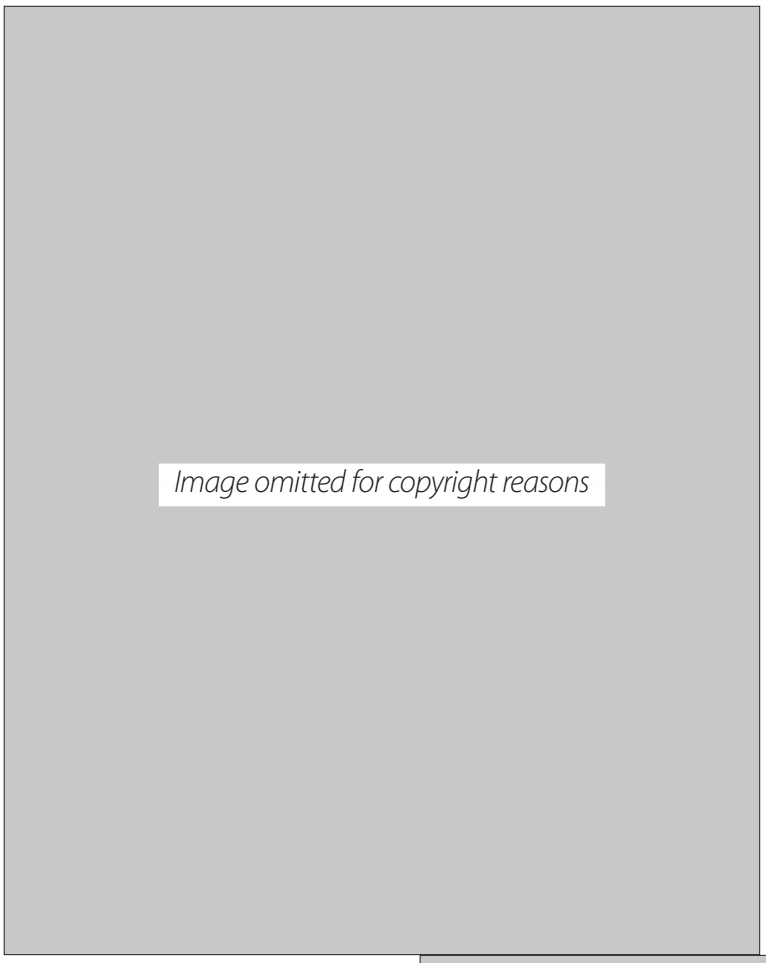

**23.** *Virgin and Child*, by Jacqueline Lerat, 1960, stoneware, 80 cm in height, parish church of Mornay-Berry, Cher, France. (Image source: *Jacqueline Lerat – L'etre et la forme*, Sèvres – Cité de la Céramique Museum, 2012.)



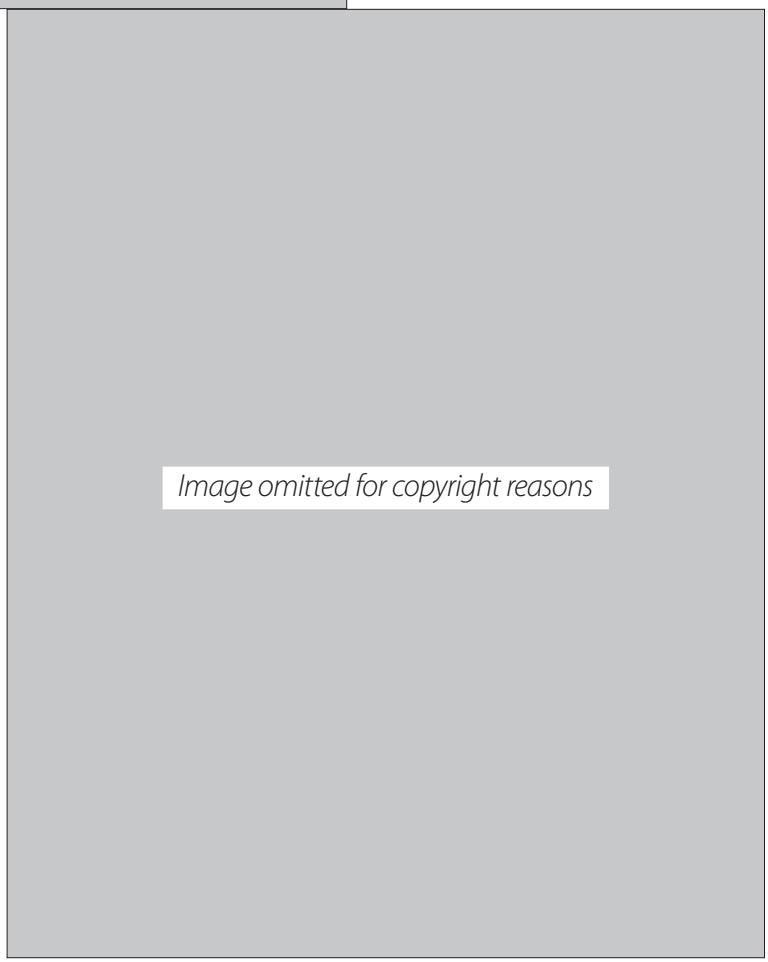

**24.** *Petite architecture à deux emboîtements*, by Jacqueline Lerat, 2000, 17.5cm in height. (Image source: *Jacqueline Lerat – Une œuvre en mouvement*, Éditions La Revue de la Céramique et du Verre, 2010.)



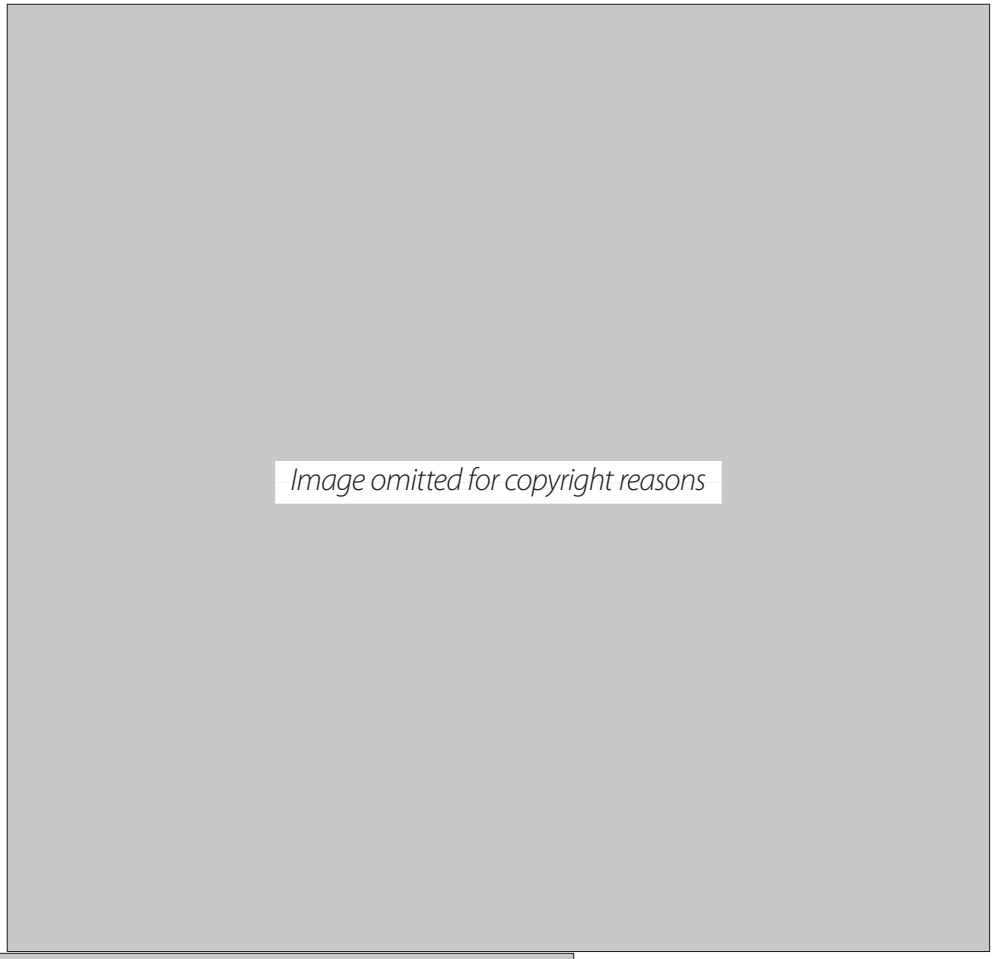

**25.** *A page from one of* Jacqueline Lerat's sketchbooks. (Image source: *Jacqueline Lerat – Une œuvre en mouvement*, Éditions La Revue de la Céramique et du Verre, 2010.)



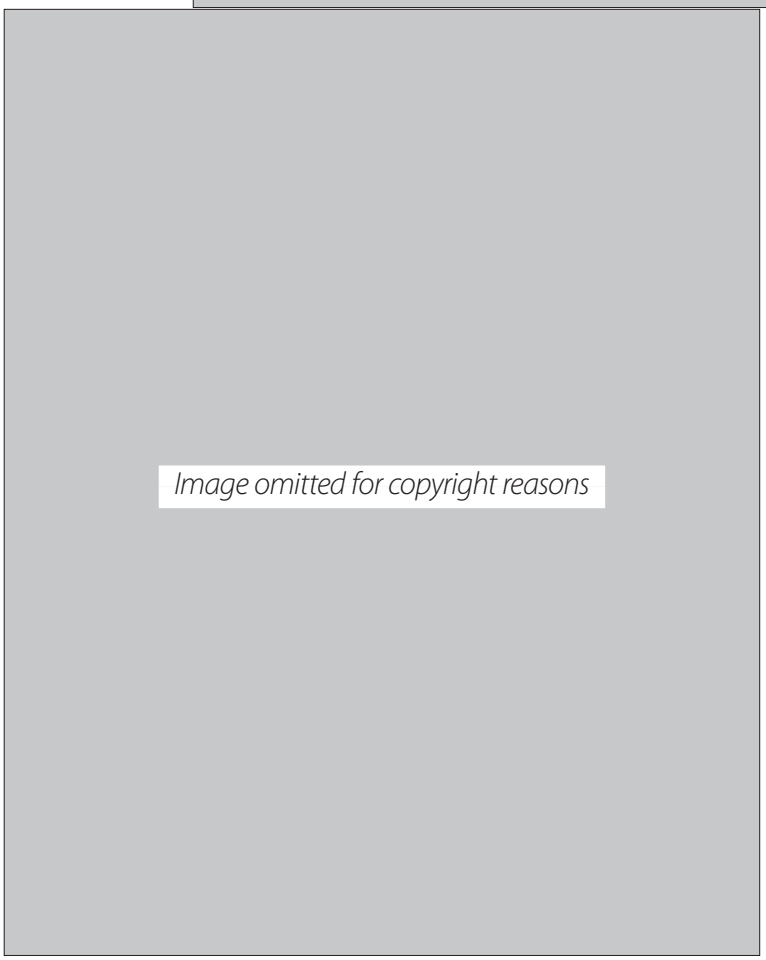

**26.** *Enjambement*, by Jacqueline Lerat, 2006, 34cm in height.
(Image source: *Jacqueline Lerat – Une œuvre en mouvement*, Éditions La Revue de la Céramique et du Verre, 2010.)



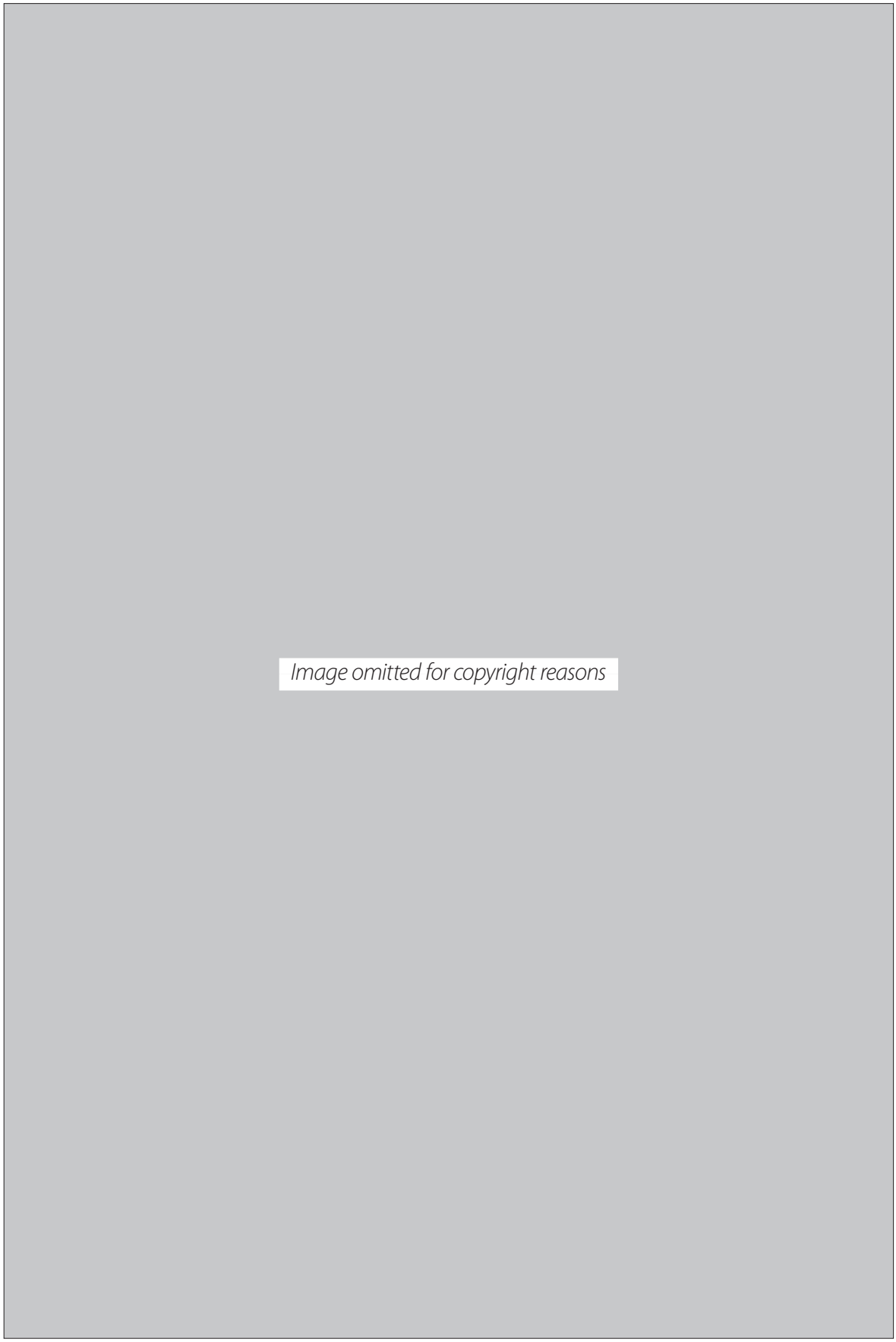

**27.** *Enjambement*, by Jacqueline Lerat, 2006, 36cm in height.
(Image source: *Jacqueline Lerat – Une œuvre en mouvement*, Éditions La Revue de la Céramique et du Verre, 2010.)



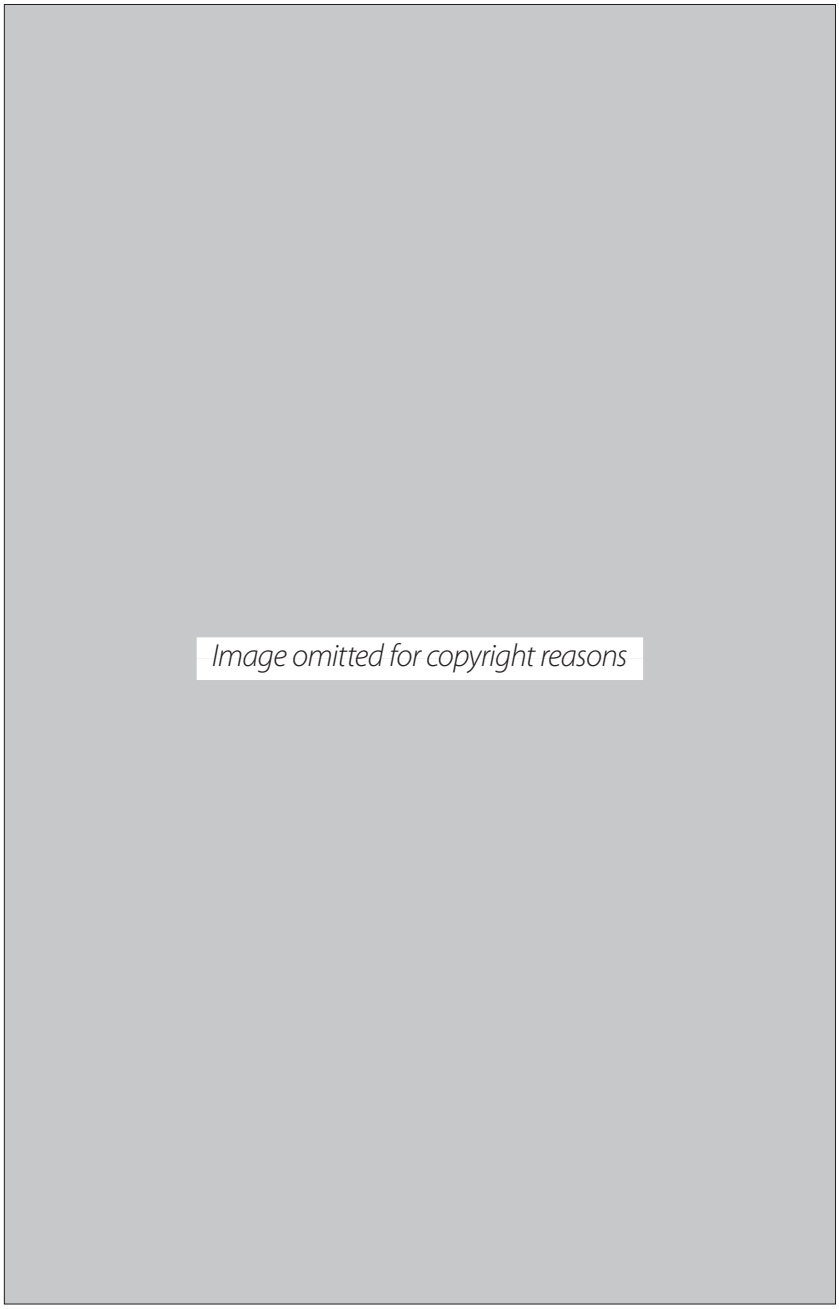

**28.** *Équilibre*, by Jacqueline Lerat, 2006, 34cm in height. (Image source: *Les pionniers de la céramique moderne La Borne*, Ville de Bourges - Musées, France 2018.)



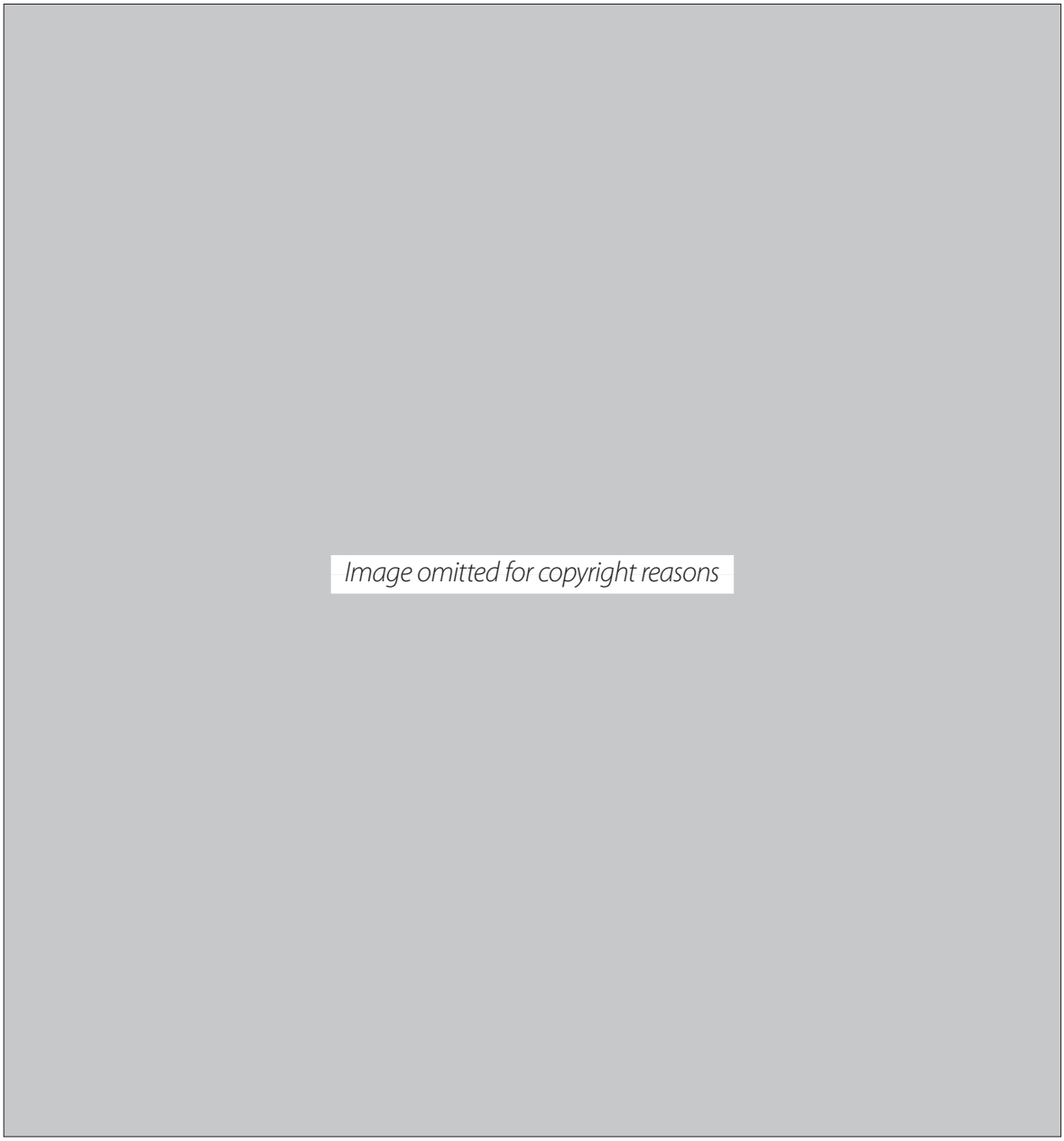

**29.** *À la limite de l'équilibre*, by Jacqueline Lerat, 2002, 40cm in height. (Image source: *Jacqueline Lerat, l'être et la forme*, Sèvres-Cité de la céramique, France, 2012.)



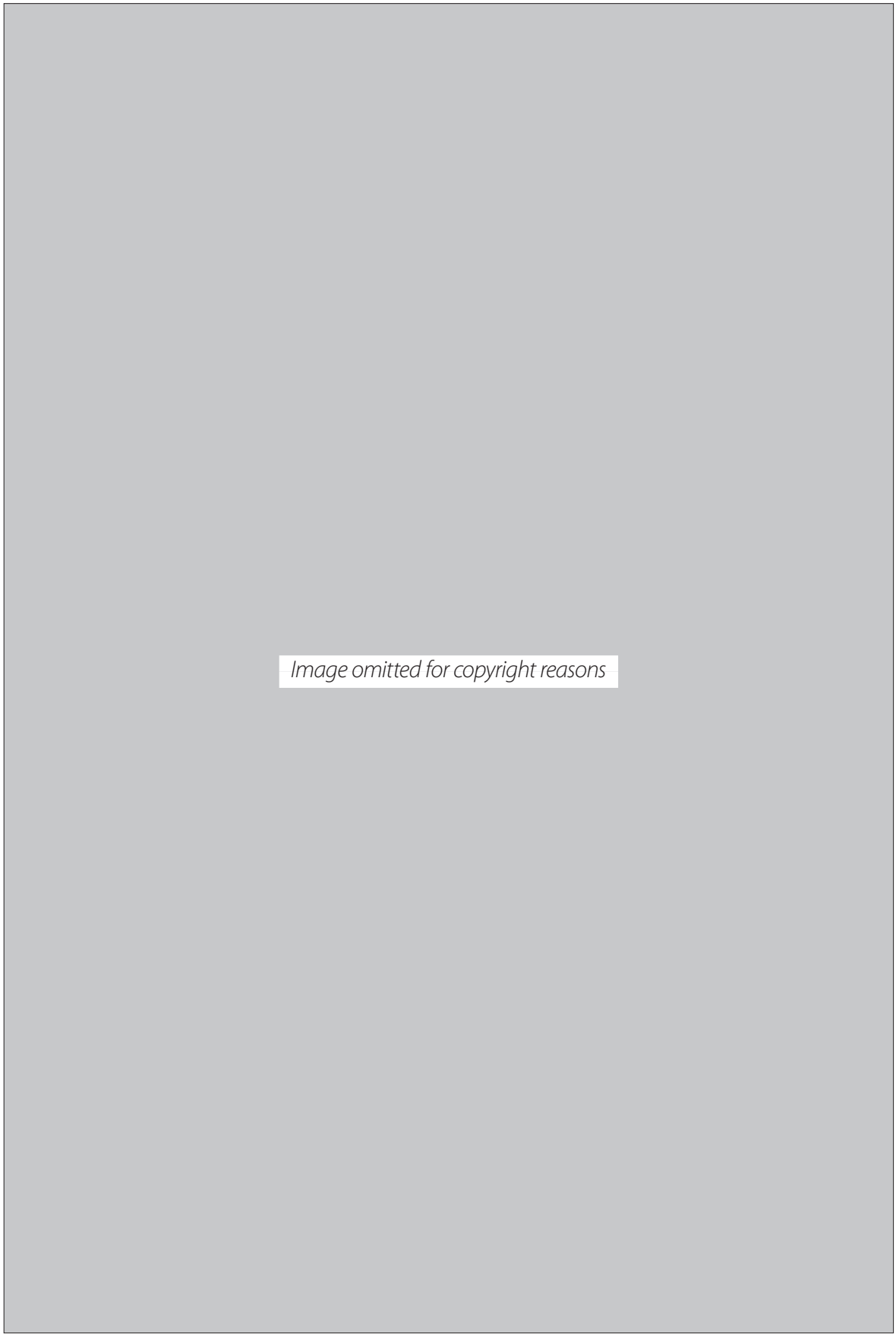

**30.** Close-up of sculpture by Jacqueline Lerat showing detail of surface texture . (Image source: Lerat family archive.)




**31.** *Équilibre*, by Jacqueline Lerat, 2006, 30cm in height. (Image source: Dossier Presse from Centre Céramique Contemporaine de La Borne, 2010.)




**32.** *Brique et Pentagone*, by Jacqueline Lerat, 2008, 30cm in height. This was the last piece produced by the artist. (Image source: *Jacqueline Lerat – Une œuvre en mouvement*, Éditions La Revue de la Céramique et du Verre, 2010.)




**33.** Portrait of Jacqueline Lerat, working in her studio in Bourges, France, 2006. (Image source: Galerie Besson, London, photograph by Bernard Guillot.)

## Chapter 4: Jacqueline Lerat

### Introduction – chapter overview

Jacqueline Lerat is arguably one of the most influential figures in the history of ceramics in France in the twentieth century, continuing into the current century. Together with a group of other artists, including her husband Jean Lerat, who established studios in the La Borne area, she was a pioneer producing abstract ceramic sculptures that were shown in galleries alongside the work of contemporary artists in other mediums. This group is significant in the wider context of the development of abstract ceramic sculpture as a recognised art form of the Modernist movement in France – a recognition that has only been established in recent times.

Jacqueline Lerat is widely regarded as being at the forefront of this field. The work that she produced in the period after her husband Jean's death in 1992 is considered by many as her strongest. It is significant that this was the first work that she had made independently and signed as such since her marriage to Jean almost fifty years previously. It is this work that is being considered here. Woodfiring was an integral aspect of Jacqueline's practice for some sixty-five years and was essential to the surfaces that she achieved in her sculptures, effects that could not have been achieved in any other way. These quiet understated surface qualities contributed in a significant manner to the power and meditative character of her abstract forms.

### 4.1: Biographical narrative as context for Jacqueline Lerat's work

Jacqueline Bouvet was born on 2nd December 1920 in the town of Bonneville in the Haute-Savoie department in the Rhône-Alpes region of eastern France, close to the border with Switzerland. Her father Jean was a history and geography teacher at the École normale d'instituteurs. She had a brother Maurice who was five years younger. When Jacqueline was two years old the family moved to Mâcon, a small city in the department of Saône-Loire in the Burgundy region. They were relatively comfortably off and somewhat academic in outlook, with a strong interest in literature and the arts.

During Jacqueline's teenage years Jean Bouvet became increasingly active in left-wing politics and was a member of the board of the local Municipality. He was involved in

assisting exiles from Germany who were fleeing the country as a result of the rise of Nazism and their opposition to Hitler, and also political refugees from the Civil War in Spain (1936-39). Together with his friend Henri Malvaux who was an artist and educator, in 1937 he visited the writer Jean Giono (1885-1970), whose work and ideals he greatly admired.

The following Spring Jean took his family, including Jacqueline, to stay at the hamlet of Contadour in Provence, where members of the pacifist group known as the 'Contadouriens', initiated by Giono and some of his friends, gathered twice a year. Those attending included many young people, admirers of Giono's work and believers in the ideals of peace and fraternity that he espoused. The Bouvet family returned to Contadour on further occasions and the experience of attending these pacifist gatherings and the people she met there left a marked impression on the young Jacqueline.[1] Ironically the act that led to the outbreak of the Second World War – the invasion of Poland by Germany – occurred on 1st September 1939, whilst one of Giono's gatherings was taking place at Contadour.

**Education and early training**

Jacqueline attended the Lycée for girls in Mâcon from 1931 to 1938, and also classes in philosophy at the Lycée Alphonse de Lamartine (for boys, also in Mâcon) in 1938. Malvaux was the drawing teacher at the Lycée (for girls), and it may have been at this time that Jacqueline first became interested in the idea of becoming an artist. She enrolled at L'École Municipale des Arts Décoratifs de Mâcon in 1939, where Malvaux was director from 1932 to 1942. At this stage Jacqueline thought that she would like to become a painter. However, in accordance with the academic art training of the time it was necessary to be able to draw accurately to become a painter, and Jacqueline felt that her skills in drawing were not of a sufficiently high standard. Also, it was her family's wish that rather than attempting to become a professional artist, she should instead train as a drawing teacher, which was considered a suitable occupation and was a popular career choice for young women of her class in France at that time.

The invasion of France by Germany began on 10th May 1940. France capitulated to the German army on the 22nd of June and an armistice was signed between the two countries

1. Maurice Bouvet, 'Jacqueline, Jean Bouvet et Jean Giono', in *Jacqueline Lerat – Une œuvre en mouvement*, Éditions La Revue de la Céramique et du Verre, 2010, pp. 137–140 (henceforth '*Jacqueline Lerat,* 2010').

which divided France into two parts – the north and west occupied zone – *Zone Occupée*, which included Paris, and the free zone – *Zone Libre*, which was to be governed by what came to be known as the Vichy government, after the regional town in which it was based, under the leadership of Maréchal Philippe Pétain (1856–1951). Under the occupation of Paris L'École des Arts Décoratifs relocated temporarily to Bordeaux, and Jacqueline attended classes there for a year (1940). Malvaux was professor of design at the École during her year there.

Friends of Jacqueline's parents owned a factory near Mâcon producing ceramic bottles for industry, and it may have been here that she first became aware of pottery. She saw pottery as being a useful 'art' and considered that by pursuing it she would be producing something practical that people could use. It is significant that her decision to become involved in pottery was made when the war was already in progress, and having an impact on people's daily lives in terms of the unavailability of everyday goods and materials.

Jacqueline began an apprenticeship in pottery at the Centre Artisanal de Poterie et Arts Plastique de Mâcon in November 1941, and remained there until July 1943 (Figure 19, page 163). She was Chef d'équipe (team leader) from October 1942 to July 1943. On completion of her apprenticeship she was qualified to work independently as a potter.[2] There were three other trainees in the ceramics department besides Jacqueline, all of whom were young men. The work they produced was earthenware utilitarian ware fired in an electric kiln.

It was during the period that she spent at the Centre Artisanal de Poterie et Arts Plastique de Mâcon that Jacqueline first met the Australian artist Anne Dangar (1885–1951), who came to teach there for a four-week residency in February/March 1942.[3] Dangar, who had taught art following her studies at art school in Sydney, moved to live in France in 1930. She became a 'disciple' of the cubist artist and philosopher Albert Gleizes (1881–1953), at the artists' colony at Moly-Sabata that he founded in the Rhône Valley in 1927. Dangar had learned her pottery skills in traditional village potteries, not by becoming an apprentice, but

2. Certificate from the Young France Craft Centre, in the Lerat family archive. Personal correspondence from François Lerat, Jacqueline Lerat's son, to the author, dated 5th February, 2015.
3. For a comprehensive account of Anne Dangar's life and work see Bruce Adams, *Rustic Cubism: Anne Dangar and the Art Colony at Moly-Sabata*, University of Chicago Press, 2004.

by producing her own work using the pottery facilities as a paying client. This included renting space in the woodfire kilns. The designs that Dangar developed in keeping with Gleizes' aims combined rustic simplicity with the principles of Cubist composition.

Jacqueline was impressed by Dangar's method of working, particularly her throwing skills and approach to her work. Once started Dangar would not stop throwing until she had filled a whole ware-board with pots. She advised the trainees 'to work quickly, to get better without wanting to be technically perfect, for in machine-like precision one cannot sense the breathing of the turner [thrower]'.[4]

Dangar was one of the earliest influences on Jacqueline, not perhaps on her style of work, but her determination that a life in ceramics could be a possibility. It is important to consider here the impact that meeting and observing Dangar, who was then 57, had on Jacqueline who was just 21. Dangar was probably one of the few women in France with an art school training earning her livelihood as a professional potter at the time, and as such could have been seen as a role model by Jacqueline, demonstrating that it was possible for a woman to spend her life working with clay. When she first met Dangar Jacqueline's parents were still not in favour of her choice of career, and meeting a woman potter who was integrating her life and work, may well have contributed to her resolve in what it was she wanted to do. Dangar is on record as stating that she would use the opportunity of the residency in Mâcon to explain the ideals and ideologies of Moly-Sabata to the young trainees, but it would appear that Jacqueline was less impressed by this aspect of Dangar's life than with her abilities as a potter.[5]

In December 1942 Malvaux was appointed director of the École Nationale des Beaux-Arts et des Arts Appliques a l'Industrie de Bourges, a post he was to retain for the following thirty-one years. He may already have been aware of the existence of La Borne, which is only thirty kilometres from Bourges. All the methods of nineteenth century production had been preserved in La Borne, and the village experienced a new lease of life during the war, as it had everything required to carry on with the production of pottery – clay, raw materials for glazes, and wood for firing. In contrast at this time the large manufactories that had

4. Quoted in Adams, 2004, p.159.
5. Adams, 2004, p.161.

superseded the traditional rural potteries were experiencing difficulties in continuing production at pre-war levels, due to restrictions on the transportation of goods and materials.

Jean Lerat, a young fine arts graduate from the Beaux Arts School in Bourges who taught there on a part-time basis, worked during the week in a studio in La Borne which had been established by François Guillaume, an entrepreneur and merchant from Bourges. The studio was located in local potter Armand Bedu's workshop and produced a range of artistic pottery inspired by traditional work. Guillaume was a collector of, and authority on the traditional pottery of the region. His introduction to La Borne had occurred as he travelled the countryside widely, sourcing products to sell in his shop 'Maison Guillaume' in Bourges, which was renowned for its quality cutlery, glass, and pottery. Guillaume returned to La Borne frequently and went so far as to learn pottery skills from the traditional potters. He also designed products for sale in his shop, which he commissioned the local potters to produce.

When Malvaux arrived to take up his post in Bourges, the school was not in a very dynamic state. The Ministry of Education was at the time encouraging the development of popular craft in line with Government policies on indigenous crafts. One of the schemes that Malvaux settled on as a means of revitalising the school was the establishment of a ceramics department. He chose Jean Lerat to help with this task. A vacancy thus arose for another artist to work in the Guillaume studio in La Borne.

Malvaux recommended that Jacqueline should go to La Borne to gain further experience working in a pottery. It was subsequently arranged that she would work in the Guillaume studio from July 1943 to June 1944. Having completed her apprenticeship in Mâcon in July 1943, Jacqueline at the age of twenty-two and travelling alone, set out for La Borne to start her career as a professional potter. As this was wartime supplies were rationed and travel restricted, and it was only by having a contract to work for Guillaume that she was allowed to leave Mâcon.[6]

6. This detail was explained in a letter from François Lerat to the author, dated 5th February 2015, in which was enclosed a copy of the Attestation de l'Employeur (Certificate of Employment) from François Guillaume to Jacqueline Bouvet, which was valid from July 1943.

**Further training and early career in La Borne**

When Jacqueline arrived in La Borne to work alongside what was to become the last generation of potters producing work in the regional style, she immediately liked what she saw – craftsmen working in the traditional way so close to nature, using local clay and firing their kilns with wood from the surrounding forests. Already with some experience in art and pottery, she was eager to soak up the rich atmosphere and to learn all that she could.

Conditions in the isolated village of La Borne were extremely primitive compared to the comfortable existence that Jacqueline had known in her family home. There was no running water in the houses, not even a village pump. Instead water had to be fetched from a well. Nor were there indoor sanitation systems or electricity. Houses were cold and damp, and La Borne, due to its geographical location, is known for its inclement weather which can be extremely cold in winter, with rain throughout much of the year.[7]

At first Jacqueline stayed in the home of an elderly woman Valentine Chameron, who made clay whistles, holy water stoups, and roof finials/ornaments (*épis de faîtage*). In addition to the traditional utilitarian wares potters in La Borne produced more individual pieces. This type of work, *L'Art Populaire* ('popular art') – often consisting of humorous figurative pieces, unique to the area and widely produced there – was much admired by Guillaume. It was the reason that he had been inspired to establish a workshop in the village in the first instance, and to employ young artists to produce work which he hoped would be the continuation of this expression.

At that time the village had a population of 350. There were seven potters with their own workshops, wheelwrights, a roofer, two stonemasons, a farrier, joiner, weaver and two clog makers. Despite wartime restrictions La Borne was still a relatively lively place to live, and was quite different from anything Jacqueline had previously experienced.[8] In addition to the work that she was employed to make, she availed of every opportunity to observe the traditional potters at work, as she recalled in an article some forty-four years after the events

7. Interview with François Lerat, conducted by the author on 22nd October 2014, in the Lerat family home in Bourges, France.
8. The depravations in terms of food and other provisions were not experienced as severely in rural areas in wartime France, as they were in the large urban centres. Jacqueline Lerat wrote an evocative account of her first impressions of, and earliest experiences in La Borne 'Another Age La Borne 1943', in *La Borne un Village de Potiers*, Association des Potiers de La Borne, 1987, pp.11–30.

described: 'I followed with pleasure, greed even, the precise, repeated movements, never unnecessary or hurried, so close to their purpose, with which the potters threw the huge storage jars or the smallest pieces.'[9] A further description in the same text gives a clear indication of working conditions in a traditional French rural pottery workshop in 1943:

> To dry the waiting pieces, to warm the atmosphere, the potter, once or twice a day, would, according to the season (except in summer), break and pile up on the very floor of the workshop, a pyramid of kindling wood, with the occasional air space, to which he would set light. The crackling flames, would reach up to the latticed roof. The workshop would be lit up by this amazing presence, a risky situation which could only be mastered by the potter's skill. […] As soon as the smoke had gone out through the open half of the door, the potter would prepare his balls of clay, according to the work which was required. A heap of embers on which a big pot of water was boiling, was left from this fire, often being the only source of warmth, which I brought back to life from time to time by a discrete kick of my clogged foot. The smoke of successive fires was deposited layer upon layer in a velvet blackness on the walls and beams.[10]

While women had traditionally worked in family potteries and still were in the 1940s, Jacqueline's position as somebody with both fine art and pottery training was unique in La Borne. Jean Giono wrote in his journal of her ambition to become a potter and her involvement in woodfiring:

> Jacqueline has a wonderful spirit that made her choose an admirable profession. She is passionate about pottery and currently lives with the potters near Bourges, after the manner of the great artists of the Renaissance. […]. She lives a wonderful life, making a profession of her passion, following the path of artisanal secrets, the mystery of glaze, good fortunes, or the disappointments of [natural] flame kilns (already she has understood the preference which must be given to woodfire kilns rather than electric kilns).[11]

Jean Bouvet had become actively involved in the Resistance movement, and was assassinated on the 28th June 1944 by the Milice (a paramilitary force established by the Vichy Regime to fight against the French Resistance), less than two months before the Liberation of Paris on 25th August. Jacqueline had left La Borne to return home to Mâcon for a visit at this time, and her father had given his approval for her to resume her activities

9. Jacqueline Lerat, 'Another Age La Borne 1943', 1987, p.26.
10. Jacqueline Lerat, 'Another Age La Borne 1943', pp.16–17.
11. From the entry in Jean Giono's journal dated 21st Sept. 1943 (as quoted in the essay 'Jacqueline, Jean Bouvet et Jean Giono' by Maurice Bouvet in *Jacqueline Lerat,* 2010, p.140.

as a ceramist in La Borne, just a couple of days before his death.[12] Jean Lerat had thought that Jacqueline would not return to La Borne after her father's death, but she chose to do so, and arrived back in September 1944. Jacqueline and Jean were engaged by the end of 1944 and got married on 3rd February 1945.

**The start of Jacqueline's work as an independent artist in La Borne**

In common with other countries in Europe at the time, in France prior to the Second World War there had been a turning away from the centralism and urbanization, which had developed as a consequence of the high levels of industrialization of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The world recession of the late 1920s and early 1930s was one of the factors that led to the growth in support for this ideology. There was enthusiasm for a return to pre-industrial and artisanal values, to a rural, locally based, simpler society of agriculture, crafts, and nationalism (*retour a la terre* / return to the soil). Such traditional values were strongly encouraged and promoted in the propaganda issued by the Vichy government.

In her book *Modernity and Nostalgia – Art and Politics in France Between the Wars*, having discussed the historical re-emergence of popular public support for nostalgic regionalism and 'the land as the locus of national identity', Romy Golan summed up the sentiment in France at the start of the war:

> The early 1940s marked the apotheosis of the French peasant and craftsman as the moral repositories for the nation. After decades of oscillation from Left to Right, the anti-machinist and anti-urban rhetoric of the return to the soil had now become the backbone of the *Revolution nationale* commanded by the Vichy regime.[13]

The ideologies surrounding a desire for a return to a simpler life more in tune with nature were influenced by the writings of the French philosopher Henri Bergson who was considered one of the most important thinkers of the day.[14] Bergson argued for a simpler and healthier life, spiritual regeneration, and an agrarian France. The fact that France had

12. Ibid., p.140.
13. Romy Golan, *Modernity and Nostalgia – Art and Politics in France Between the Wars*, Yale University Press, 1995, p.156. See also *Rustic Cubism*, Adams, 2004, p.116.
14. Including his book *L'Évolution Créatrice*, 1907 (The English translation of which *Creative Evolution* was first published in 1911) and collection of essays *La Pensée et le mouvant: Essais et conférences*, 1934 (published in English as *The Creative Mind* in 1946).

been defeated by, and was now partly occupied and ruled by Nazi Germany strengthened people's desire to find the true France and French way of life.

These ideals were supported by many groups and organisations which had very different political motivations, and by individuals with such opposing views as Pétain and De Gaulle (1890–1970). They were also adapted by many well-known artists who fled the cities and now wanted to be seen as being part of country life, living and working there instead of just visiting to paint rural scenes. These artists included André Lhote (with whom, coincidentally, Dangar had studied briefly in Paris during her first visit to France in 1926), André Derain, Maurice de Vlaminck, Auguste Herbin, and André Dunoyer de Segonzac. Some artists who already had leanings in this direction sought support from the Pétain administration to further their ideas in practical ways. They included Gleizes, who used the example of Dangar teaching pottery and drawing to local children, in a bid to gain funding for his artists' colony at Moly-Sabata.

La Borne was at this time of interest to a wide range of people including figures from museums and education such as Pierre-Louis Duchartre, the Director of the National Ceramics Museum in Sèvres, and Georges-Henri Rivière, who was curator of the Musée Nationale des Arts et Traditions Populaires in Paris. Both men promoted the installation of Paul Beyer, one of the most renowned French ceramists of the interwar years in a workshop in the village in 1942. The reasoning behind this decision was that Beyer's presence might inspire a new dynamism in the traditional workshops. Malvaux was well connected in Parisian circles before, during and after the war, and would have moved in the same circles as both of these individuals. It was however Jean Lerat who had arranged Malvaux's first visit to La Borne.[15]

During his time in La Borne Paul Beyer had befriended Jean and Jacqueline. As an experienced artist he was an important influence in the development of pottery in La Borne, despite the fact that he lived and worked there for just three years prior to his death in 1945. Bayer, like Guillaume, had a deep interest in the traditional and historical pottery of the

15. Personal correspondence from François Lerat to the author dated 5th February 2015.

region (known as the 'Berry'[16]) before he came to work in La Borne. He particularly appreciated the figurative work produced by two members of the Talbot dynasty of potters, Jacques Sébastien Talbot (1769–1841) and Marie Talbot (1814–1874). Marie Talbot produced remarkable ornamental figures of ladies, some of which were over a metre in height, in which she referenced the personalities and fashions of the day. Referring to the sense of humour evident in this work the writer John Fowles described Marie Talbot as having 'the sharp humour of a Jane Austen in ceramics'[17] (Figure 22, page 165).

Bayer's professional contacts included influential galleries such as the Folklore Gallery in Lyon, established by the poet Marcel Michaud, which showed modernist designs by Le Corbusier, Charlotte Perriand, and Walter Gropius, alongside ceramics by Picasso and Anne Dangar, among others, as well as traditional pottery. The Lerats work was also shown there.[18]

## 4.2: The formative influences and historical precedents that contributed to the development of Jacqueline Lerat's work

### L'art Populaire

During the early period that the Lerats worked together in the Guillaume studio, the work they produced was based on and influenced by the traditional folk pottery of La Borne. The creation of this work and of Guillaume's original ideas to produce it should be considered in the wider context of a longing for a simpler past, a nostalgic view of rural life and its heroic peasant figures, both male and female. Using the La Borne clay and woodfiring, much of the work consisted of figurative sculptures some on religious themes, created by assembling thrown elements and was very much in keeping with the nationalist sentiment that existed at the time in this occupied country. As referenced earlier, there was an attraction in wanting to return to or be inspired by the art of an earlier period, a sense of nostalgia for simpler times where certainty and stability were to be found, particularly in relation to rural life. In looking forward to the country being free again, there was a renewed

16. This region, which today consists of the départements of Cher, Indre and parts of Vienne, was formerly a province until provinces were replaced by départements in 1790. Bourges was the capital of the Berry province.
17. John Fowles, 'Simple Things, Splendid Forms', *La Borne une village de potiers (La Borne – A Potters' Village)*, Association des Potiers de La Borne, 1987, p.60.
18. Éric Moinet, 'La Borne', published in *Jacqueline Lerat – L'Être et la Forme*, Sèvres – Cité de la Céramique, 2012, p.30 (henceforth '*Jacqueline Lerat*, 2012').

search for cultural roots and it is in this context that the production of *Art Populaire* – Folk Art, should be viewed.

In 1945 the Lerats began renting Paul Beyer's studio, which was equipped with a small ($0.5m^3$) woodfire kiln with a single firebox (Figure 20, page 163). This kiln was the first of its kind to be built in the area. It was an adaptation of the huge round two-storey kilns, with four or more fireboxes that were used for firing the porcelain at the Sèvres Manufactory (up to the 1960s), using the same type of firebox on a small cubic kiln. This design was significant in that it demonstrated that an artist/potter could have a studio and small woodfire kiln for their personal use, instead of sharing a large communal kiln between workshops, as had been the tradition in La Borne and other pottery villages throughout France. The concept and design of the kiln were to have a major influence on the development of studio-based wood-fired ceramics in La Borne and beyond in the future. For the Lerats it was the first time that they were responsible for firing their own work, having control over every aspect of the process.

The post-war years marked a transition in La Borne from what could be viewed as a pre-industrial era as it had existed prior to the war, to a post-industrial age. There was no longer as much demand for the traditional pots most of which were used in preserving, storing, cooking, and serving food (Figure 1, page 43, and Figure 9, page 53). But pottery production in La Borne did not cease entirely in the immediate post-war period, as it did in so many other traditional pottery villages throughout France, where up to that time life had changed very little during the preceding hundreds of years.

From the time of their marriage in 1945 until 1948 all the work that both Jean and Jacqueline made was signed 'J. Lerat', with no distinction made as to which of them produced particular pieces. From 1948 this signature changed to 'J.J. Lerat'. Both their son François Lerat and his wife Esther Martinez explained that the idea of using a joint signature had not been Jacqueline's, but Jean's. While Jacqueline may not have agreed with the idea she complied with Jean's wishes, which should be viewed in the context of the social mores pertaining to married couples at that time. They chose not to use 'J. Lerat', as this had been

Jean's signature before their marriage. Adding the second 'J' was therefore for Jacqueline's representation.[19]

The Lerats ceased working for Guillaume in 1947 and became fully independent artists. They bought Beyer's studio and equipment, including his kiln, in 1949. They both fired their work in this kiln for the remainder of their time in La Borne, until they moved to the nearby city of Bourges in 1955. The work that they had produced for Guillaume between 1943 and 1945 had been fired in one of the large traditional kilns, belonging to Armand Bedu.

From the outset Jean and Jacqueline considered themselves as artists working in clay, rather than potters. Jean was a member of a number of artistic societies based in Paris and had many contacts there which saw him exhibiting in the capital as early as 1936. Unlike Jean, Jacqueline was not trained as a sculptor. Having initially wanted to be a painter, in ceramics she found that she could do all things at once, combining painting, sculpting, and pottery processes. She found freedom in working in ceramics, and woodfiring was a part of this. She felt that fire brought something more, something different to her work – the kiln added another dimension.[20]

While the Lerats gradually moved in the direction of modernist sculpture – their work was nonetheless still heavily grounded in tradition. They continued to make usable pots, but adapted to the changing economic needs after the war. As artists, their work changed and they survived. The Lerats view was 'neither to accept nor to reject the tradition, but perhaps, to be close to it; not to be better, or worse but something else'.[21] The traditional potters in La Borne on the other hand, although some tried to change with the times and make more modern pieces, their workshops continued to decline to the extent that by the end of the 1960s none remained.[22]

Whilst still living in La Borne Jean and Jacqueline began making *Bouquetières* – small figurative sculptures to decorate tables and hold flowers. Initially the *Bouquetières*

19. Interview with François Lerat and Esther Martinez, 22nd October 2014.
20. Interview with François Lerat, 22nd October 2014.
21. Jacqueline Lerat, 'Bernard Leach, *A Potter's Book*, une Rencontre', *La Revue de la Céramique et du Verre*, No. 131, May/June 2003, p.30.
22. Jacqueline Lerat addresses this point *in L'être et la forme – rencontre avec Jacqueline Lerat Céramiste*, un film réalisé par Jeanne Hadorn, 2007. See also Gwyn Hanssen, 'The Potters of Haut-Berry', *Pottery in Australia*, Vol. 8, No. 2 Spring 1969, pp.7–13. Reprinted in *The Log Book*, issue 47, 2011, pp.15–21.

developed when they were commissioned by the Christofle Company to work on a project to produce bells for use at table.[23] They took the idea further, to create small bouquets to decorate and enliven the table, and the resulting pieces were exhibited in Paris at the Christofle Gallery. The figures were constructed so that they incorporated spaces to contain water and flowers. The early examples are based on peasant characters and are rather rural in appearance. An ash-glaze was applied before the pieces were salt-glazed.

After the Lerats move to Bourges the figures of the *Bouquetières* became more urban. Gradually Jacqueline began incorporating additional features, changing the clothes, hats, and hairstyles according to the fashions of the day. The Lerats made many of these small sculptural figures, which fitted easily into the kiln around their larger individual pieces, increasing the economic value of each firing. The basic forms were created on the wheel and the pieces were then assembled, with up to a hundred figures produced at a time. The *Bouquetières* became very popular and the Lerats continued to make them until 1973. After each firing the best pieces were selected and sent to shops in Bourges and Paris. Members of the public then came to the studio to buy the remaining figures.

### *L'art Sacré*

In France many churches had been destroyed during the war and in the following years reconstruction, restoration, and modernisation were undertaken on a grand scale. Many new churches were also built. This meant that there was much demand for religious art – painting and sculpture – to furnish these buildings. A movement which became known as *L'art Sacré*, led by the Dominican religious order and by two of its members in particular. Father Marie-Alain Couturier (1897–1954) who had been a professional stained glass artist working in the Atelier des Arts Sacré in Paris before entering the religious life, and Father P.R. Régamey (1900–96), advocated a more minimalist approach in both the furnishing and decoration of church interiors, as well as in the structures themselves. They favoured more abstract figurative sculptures in materials including wood and clay.

Couturier's concern was that unlike in former times, the major artists of the day no longer had a connection with church art. This was, he considered, the church's great loss. His aim

23. The famous Parisian company specialising in tableware, founded by jeweller/silversmith Charles Christofle in 1830 and still in existence today. Artists and designers whose designs have been produced by the company include Man Ray, Jean Cocteau and Gio Ponti.

was to redress the situation and his superiors gave him permission to do so. It did not matter to Couturier whether or not the artists he approached to discuss commissions were Christian.[24] Not surprisingly some of these projects were somewhat contentious, and met with criticism from the more conservative members within the church, who were vehemently opposed to Modernism. Artists closely involved in *L'Art Sacré* movement included the painters Maurice Denis and Georges Desvallières (who together had founded the Aleliers des Art Sacré), Georges Rouault, Alfred Manessier, and Germaine Richier. An annual exhibition *Salon Art Sacré* instigated by Father Couturier was held in Paris. The Lerats work was shown at this event for the first time in 1948.

In La Borne creating religious art was part of the tradition, including large roadside markers – often Calvary crosses – in which thrown components were joined to form large pieces.[25] Another connection existed between La Borne and *L'Art Sacré*. Paul Beyer had produced many religious sculptures in stoneware during his career before he settled in the village. Beyer's sculptures 'in a form which resolutely modernised the vocabulary of traditional religious ceramic statues, and the work of the potters of La Borne, and in particular the Talbot family, which was famous in the nineteenth century', had met with great success when shown in *L'exposition d'Art Sacré Moderne* organised at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in November 1938.[26]

The *Art Sacré* produced by the Lerats should be considered in this context, in addition to the broader movement of the religious art created by artists after the Second World War. The couple participated in meetings organised by the Dominican Order with artists to discuss proposals for new religious work, and in 1948 Father Régamey travelled to La Borne to meet them.[27] They created work for a number of churches, amongst the most significant being Jacqueline's commission to make a Nativity group for the cathedral in Bourges in 1954 (which is still put on display each year, despite the fact that the figure of the infant and two sheep were stolen at some point). Jacqueline considered churches as good places to

24. Couturier was associated with such ground breaking religious arts projects as Matisse's Chapel of the Dominican's at Vence (Chapelle du Rosaire de Vence) on the Côte d'Azur, and Le Corbusier's Notre Dame du Haut in Ronchamp in eastern France (Haute-Saône department).
25. One such cross by Jacques Sebastien Talbot (1769–1841) which used to stand at the entrance of the village of La Borne and is now in the collection of Musées de Bourges is 3.5 metres in height.
26. Éric Moinet, 'La Borne', in *Jacqueline Lerat*, 2012, p.27.
27. Jean-Roch Bouiller, 'L'Art Sacré', *Jacqueline Lerat*, 2012, pp.42-43.

have work on display, as they provided an opportunity for it to be seen by many people (Figure 23, page 165).[28]

The Lerats left La Borne and moved to Bourges in 1955. Jean had been invited to teach fulltime at École Nationale des Beaux-Arts et des Arts Appliques a l'Industrie de Bourges, a post that he would retain until 1978. Although they had owned their own studio in La Borne since 1949, the Lerats had continued to live in a rented house. As Jean had recently inherited his parent's house in Bourges, this was a further reason for the move. It was also influenced by the fact that the couple now had two young children, and the older child François was reaching the age of attending the Lycée. The nearest Lycée to La Borne was in Bourges. They soon established a studio in the garden of the house in Bourges and built a new and larger kiln.

When Malvaux had decided that a kiln should be built at the art school in Bourges in 1944/45, he contacted the ceramist Gensoli at the Manufacture de Sèvres, who sent him the plans for a down-draught kiln of 0.75m³. Louis Foucher, the mason from La Borne who had already constructed Paul Beyer's kiln, built the kiln assisted by Jean Lerat. This was the second kiln to be built to the same design as Paul Beyer's, based on the Sèvres type kilns, but it had two fireboxes.[29] Jean enlarged these plans for the kiln for the new studio in Bourges, making the chamber 2m$^3$ in size, to accommodate the larger sculptural and abstract work that both he and Jacqueline now planned to make. It also had two fireboxes (Figure 21, page 165). Installed in their new studio, the Lerats were now established in the phase of their careers that continued until Jean's death in 1992.

Although living in relative isolation in the village of La Borne the Lerats had from the start kept abreast of contemporary artists and art movements. An important means of keeping up to date with current developments were their subscriptions to art magazines. Notable among these in their early period was the journal *Art d'Aujourd'hui*, published from 1949 to 1954 under the direction of André Bloc, which provided a window into the world of international trends in painting, sculpture, architecture and also dance. The magazine was an influential inspiration for the Lerats in taking their work in a more abstract direction.

28. Interview with François Lerat, 22nd October, 2014.
29. Jacqueline et Jean Lerat, in *Les Fours*, Dossier d'Argile No. 5, 1990, pp.103–108. Also 'Four Sèvres' by Jacqueline Lerat, in *Paroles de Feu – les Fours à Bois en France*, Musée Bernard Palissy, 2000.

Once they had ceased working for Guillaume, much of their work was sold in galleries in Paris, including the well-known Galerie Rouard. Their more frequent visits to the capital, where they were exposed to the atmosphere of artistic fervour of the post-war era, provided a further stimulus to their work.

**Modernist Abstract Sculpture**

In an interview conducted with François Lerat at his home in Bourges in October 2014, he dated the development of his parents work 'becoming more abstract' precisely to the year 1954, just prior to their move to Bourges.[30] Jacqueline discussed this period in her and Jean's joint work in an article published in *Ceramics Art and Perception* in 2001, explaining that working the clay as sculptors and ceramists they 'kept diversifying techniques', as she explained:

> Our shapes varied, each time bringing up the necessary question: what is the meaning? Shape and sense work together, one is bound to the other so as to promote unity. The shape exists as having sense. The shape is a thought. This new way of grasping the material, the wish to create something personal, and the arrival of several ceramists gave La Borne a new outlook.[31]

This was a crucial period, not only in that it represented a new departure in the Lerats personal work – a move away from functional forms toward more abstract pieces, but also in the development of La Borne as a centre for the production of contemporary ceramics.

In their *Art Sacré* work, the Lerats had been involved in the production of modernist sculpture on a religious theme. This work necessarily brought them into contact with architects and other artists involved in the modernist movement with whom they collaborated on some projects. They were eager to participate in contemporary architectural design and were among the artists, architects and designers of the day who had a shared commitment to Modernism, exploring form in relation to space. Their individual or personal work – which was still produced jointly – also developed in this direction. Based on human or animal forms, the sculptures became less obviously representational and more abstract.

30. Interview with François Lerat, 22nd October 2014.
31. Françoise de l'Épine', 'Jacqueline Lerat', *Ceramics Art and Perception*, issue 46, 2001, p.33.

While the work produced by the group of artists who settled in La Borne in the 1940s and 1950s is sometimes considered in isolation from developments that were occurring in other areas in France, and more broadly within Europe, this was the period that saw the production of ceramics by such internationally recognized artists as Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) and Joan Miró (1893–1983). These painters, who were experimenting in ceramics had the assistance or collaboration of skilled potters in the making and firing of their work. Miró worked with the Catalan potter Josep Llorens Artigas in 1944 and again in the 1950s, and Picasso worked at the Madoura Pottery in Vallauris in the South of France, intermittently between 1946 and 1962. The main impact of the work produced by these and other artists, who did not ordinarily work in clay, was in demonstrating a sense of freedom of expression that was possible in the medium. Picasso vitalised the medium with his inventive transformation of pots, such as vases, that were thrown for him at the Madoura workshop, into sculptural forms including birds, animals, and female figures. The Lerats were among those who became aware of Picasso's work in ceramics early on and appreciated its innovative qualities.

### 4.3: The evolution and reception of Jacqueline Lerat's work from the early 1990s

Jean Lerat died on 20th May 1992. He had been ill for some years and Jacqueline had cared for him at home. The last joint firing of their kiln had taken place in December 1988. After Jean's death it took some time before Jacqueline, who was then seventy-one, began working again. However with the help of potter Lucien Petit, the kiln was fired in July 1993. Jacqueline and Jean had continued to use the same blend of three local clays from the La Borne area – Baillys, Trous à Terres, and Tierceau, which were stored in large quantities in their old studio in La Borne, throughout their careers. After Jean's death the composition of the clay body was simplified, omitting one of the three, as the supply had run out.

Throughout Jacqueline's career her interpretations of the human figure were central in the evolution of her work. From the very earliest pieces created in La Borne in the 1940s, made in response to the traditional and historical 'Bornois' figurative pieces, to the *Bouquetieres* of the 1950 and 1960s, to which she added aspects of contemporary fashions, and the simplified forms of the later figurative religious sculptures. Gradually as features became less defined and the forms more abstract, she moved from figuration toward abstraction.

The work produced in the last phase of her career displays a deep understanding of materials and an articulation in the process of constructing the hand-built forms. These forms, which succeed in portraying Jacqueline's preoccupation with exploring movement, space, and volume, include series on three different themes that were of special interest to her.

Architecture was one of the main influences in Jacqueline's work. A series made in 2000 directly references this art form. While the typical dimensions are no greater than 19cm high by 25cm wide, they belie this scale and have a monumentality, a sense to which their surface treatment – a combination of multi-layered surface texture and subtle variation in tone – contributes, as can be seen in the piece *Petite architecture à deux emboîtements*, 2000 (Figure 24, page 167). The accompanying page from Jacqueline's sketchbook (Figure 25, page 167) shows some of the drawings on which the series was based. The written notes include technical details of engobes and pigments and the words *habiter l'espace* – 'inhabiting space'.

In an essay published in *Jacqueline Lerat – L'être et la Forme*, Jean-Roch Bouiller stated that:

> Architectural tension in the works of Jacqueline Lerat lies in their ability to define space, punctuate it, inhabit it. […]. Long before the issue of installation was handled by a whole generation of ceramists, [… she] conceived her works in relation to space'.[32]

The final piece that Jacqueline created *Brique et Pentagone* (Figure 32, page 177) was also based on an architectural theme. This relatively small piece which is 30cm in height, has an impact that makes its scale irrelevant. Displaying harmony of form and surface it references mass and balance as well as the intersection of volumes and other architectural concerns. In the 2012 retrospective exhibition of Jacqueline's work at the National Ceramics Museum in Sèvres, this form displayed with others of similar dimensions, seemed to resonate with power and emotion, demanding attention in a quiet sort of way, while evoking a sense of tranquillity and serenity.

Other pieces illustrated here belong to two related series – *Équilibre* (equilibrium; a state of balance, poise), and *Enjambement* (enjambment – in verse: the continuation of the sense

32. Jean-Roch Bouiller, 'Approche de L'Architecture', *Jacqueline Lerat*, 2012, p.92.

without a pause beyond the end of the line. From the French *enjambement*, from *enjamber* – to stride[33]). In the *Enjambements* series (Figures 26 and 27, page 169) Jacqueline referenced contemporary dance, an artistic expression that she found fascinating and that much influenced her work, especially the choreography of Merce Cunningham and Pina Bausch (founder of Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch), which was of interest to her as it questioned 'the limits of the body through the problematic movement of the body in representation'.[34] The work illustrated from this series clearly expresses this concern. The forms can be interpreted as assembled figurative elements in balance, but not an easily achieved balance. One senses a certain awkwardness of stance; balance achieved temporarily, but unsteadily and with difficulty.

In the second series *Équilibre*, (Figures 28, 29, and 31, pages 171 and 175) Jacqueline explored themes that again included modern dance. While all three sculptures display a certain tension, the forms are carefully balanced and harmonious. They have a poignancy that can be interpreted as that of an older person in body becoming increasingly frail, limited in movement and actions, yet gaining inspiration from a creative source where there was vibrancy and agility, facilitating an extended range of movements. There is also evidence of Jacqueline's strength of spirit that did not allow her personal physical limitations to curb her creativity, and kept her working against the odds. Figure 29 (on page 171) is a particularly powerful example of this late work. At 40cm in height, it is one of the tallest. Though abstract, it nonetheless speaks eloquently of the human condition. Its concerns are those of balancing, stretching, extending to the limit of one's abilities, and the tension that results from such movement. Its title is *À la limite de l'équilibre* (At the Limit of Equilibrium).

Writing of these series, Éric Moinet stated:

> She undoubtedly asked herself relevant questions, how to speak about the body, to write the movement in her sculptures while questioning the aesthetic role of the body redefined as a field of sensitive experiences. This simplification of the real, this deconstruction proposed by the juxtaposition of volumes or disparate parts of the body in movement was at the heart of her creation. She sought the power centre, the energy hidden in each figure so as to make visible the invisible.[35]

33. *Chambers 21st Century Dictionary*, 1996 edition.
34. Éric Moinet, 'Approche du Corps, de sa Représentation à son Abstraction', *Jacqueline Lerat*, 2012, p.132.
35. Ibid., p.132.

In these forms Jacqueline succeeded in expressing fundamental aspects of what it means to be human – of strength combined with frailty, of determination and hesitancy. They project a sense of what is possible – but within limits.

Jacqueline was for many years involved in the Maison de la Culture in Bourges, which was established in 1964, where she had the opportunity to attend performances of contemporary theatre, music and choreography. In her later years attending such performances must have drawn into sharp definition the contrast between her own limited range of movements and those of the dancers she observed. To capture this sense of the potential for movement in her sculptures became a means of addressing in a positive manner, what could in other circumstances have been a depressing realisation and acceptance.

Of the *Équilibre* series Jean-Roch Bouiller stated that they 'constitute a moment of achievement, of serenity in her work'. Bouiller considered that 'the culmination of a life, an œuvre, a thought, a commitment, [were] all given coherence in these last pieces', and continued: 'Jacqueline Lerat sought a certain point of balance, a moment of suspended breathing, frozen by fire. This almost impossible [quest] has richly nourished her reflection and artistic journey in the latter part of her life.'[36] Jacqueline continued to explore the possibilities for expression – of form combined with materials and process – up the last pieces that she created.

Nature was a constant theme in Jacqueline's work from her earliest days. Her respect for and attraction to nature came from hiking with her family in Mâcon, and with Jean Giono in Haut-Provence. Her father had been actively involved in the Youth Hostel movement and spending time walking and exploring in the countryside was very much part of family life. Later in the garden of her home in Bourges, Jacqueline's credo was to 'let nature do her work while channelling its wildness'.[37] The garden continued to be a special focus for her and provided a constant source of inspiration. Flowers and food plants intermingled, as well as fruit trees, bushes and more ornamental shrubs. The walk from the house to the studio each day took her through the garden, which she referred to as 'a parallel life'. In Jeanne

36. Jean-Roch Bouiller, Recherche de l'Équilibre', *Jacqueline Lerat*, 2012, p.144.
37. From the storyboards at the exhibition *Jacqueline Lerat L'être et la Forme* – Sèvres, 2012.

Hadorn's 2007 film, Jacqueline describes sitting looking at the garden and removing her spectacles, as something that she liked to do, and what she observed:

> There are no edges and forms lose their clarity, fuse together, the red rose is just a brush stroke and the pinks get mixed with their surrounding greens – the depths are still there, but less precise, more mysterious. I feel I am part of them. Then slowly I readjust my vision. Things get back into place, I also refocus myself. I have perceived. […] My difficulties are still there, but I get strength from these moments.

Jacqueline describes this 'exercise' in altering the mode of perception and observation, blurring sharp outlines and distinctions between different shapes, forms and colours, as though it were a welcomed temporary escape into another realm, the effects of which remained with her as inspiration for her work – a different way of seeing the familiar, that rendered it unfamiliar.

Gallery owner Anita Besson (1933–2015) described her visit to Jacqueline's home and studio in 2005: 'Then I walked round her magical garden, which gave her such delight. It was not like a neat English garden. It was carefully cultivated, but full of small areas where nature had been allowed to run free amongst her and Jean's ceramic pieces.'[38]

Both in her home and studio Jacqueline made arrangements of natural objects, dried fruits, plants and flowers, eggs, feathers. Pieces of fruit were allowed to decompose, dry and wrinkle. In observing their metamorphosis she considered that they became more interesting, and did 'extraordinary things'. In this manner she created a most inspiring environment within her home, with natural objects displayed in specific arrangements combined with both her own and Jean's work.

Jacqueline's method of constructing her sculptures was to incrementally add small pieces of clay, gradually building up the form (Figure 33, page179). She discussed this process in an interview with Carole Andréani in 2007:

> The form is for me a history of movement, tension, verticality to hold and retain – if the form rounds out, if it goes at an angle, to try to keep a certain tension. It comes from a balance between the gesture that pushes the clay from the outside and at the same time supports it inside. The life of the piece happens in this in-between. If you

38. Anita Besson, 'Meeting with Jacqueline', *Jacqueline Lerat*, 2010, p.165.

> are not absolutely present at this moment, it is seen very quickly, the form becomes weak.[39]

While at first sight the surface texture of Jacqueline's work might appear to be a 'natural' outcome of her method of hand construction, this is not in fact the case. Similarly, it might appear that the tones are entirely as a result of the woodfire process on a raw clay body. On closer observation however it becomes clear that the colours and textures have evolved through a careful working of engobes, pigments, and in some instances glazes, into the clay surface to encourage particular colour responses. She also worked *chamotte* (grog) into the surfaces to vary the texture. Brushes, modelling spatulas and her fingers were used to create softly undulating textures.

Jacqueline said of this aspect of her technique 'the base clay, the engobe and the grogs combine so that a [new] material appears. In this approach I like that moment when knowledge is no longer enough'.[40] As she worked on the surface of each piece, layering slips that were coloured with oxides and washes of stains on top of and into the base clay body, the form took on a different aspect. It was as though a new form emerged. At this stage construction of the form went beyond the point where familiarity with materials based on experience was sufficient guidance for the creative process, and new territory had to be explored.

The colour qualities on Jacqueline's sculptures are not of a thin superficial coating applied as an afterthought – instead they are an integral part of the form. Nor have they been applied in an arbitrary fashion. They are the result of much consideration by an artist who, while quite familiar with her basic range of materials over many years of practice, was nonetheless constantly testing and researching new combinations of colours and pigments to achieve variations in tone that were appropriate for her work. Following the closure of the porcelain factories in nearby Vierzon the Lerats had obtained quantities of different raw materials which they used to test and make up engobe, slip, and glaze recipes, allowing new possibilities in the treatment of surfaces in their work. In 2008 some 654 different tests and materials were recorded in Jacqueline's studio in Bourges, 'On the containers for

39. Jacqueline Lerat quoted in 'Construire ce corps autre', by Carole Andréani, *La Revue de la Céramique et du Verre*, No. 155, July/August 2007, p35.
40. Jacqueline Lerat – quoted in *8 artistes & la terre*, Éditions ARgile, 2009, p.118.

storing the engobes and glazes, numbered references record a locality, a technical book or a colleague. For example 'Yellow Barbara'; the 'Leach – vine ash'; the 'Digan–Noron' clay; the 'Goat dung' (yellow clay around La Borne which fires very dark).'[41]

Jacqueline carefully considered combinations of engobes and washes in devising surface treatments appropriate for each individual piece. She frequently used a wash composed of porcelain and nepheline syenite. It was only on seeing an image of her work in progress prior to completion and firing, that it became clear just how much the surfaces had been worked, with evidence of applications of numerous coloured pigments, even as the pieces were still being constructed. The unfired colours being much stronger than fired ones, the effect was of an abstract painting, the surface of which was textured with thick layers of multi-coloured paint. In the fired form these are surfaces worthy of attention – for the eye to explore at a slow pace. On a scale of textural qualities they could perhaps be described as 'rough', as in meaning not smooth, but they are not rough in a way that would deter a wish to touch and explore them.

Work that comes to mind in terms of intensely worked surfaces which bears comparison with Jacqueline's is that of Hans Coper, which Garth Clark described in terms of:

> Manipulation of surface, a kind of painting with texture and shadows. Even though it was the result of many hours of arduous and patient work in abrading the surface with steel wool and tools, it appeared absolutely natural, as though it had sprung unaided from the fire and chemistry of the slips and glazes alone.' [42]

Whereas Coper achieved his surfaces by removing material, rubbing back before applying oxides, Jacqueline achieved hers by adding on – applying and brushing in coloured slips and washes of pigment. The naturalness of the results they both achieved are however very similar. They succeed by not distracting from the forms, and are essential in adding to their presence. In Jacqueline's work the natural qualities of the unrefined clay underneath merge with surfaces, which are simple and complex at the same time. The undulating surface marks were further highlighted by the action of flame and flyash during firing, in a quiet action that did not obliterate them.

41. *Jacqueline Lerat*, 2010, pp.34–35.
42. Clark, *The Potter's Art*, 1995, p.176.

On close study of the surfaces of Jacqueline's sculptures the impression is of earth and earth tones; evocative of aerial views of landscapes void of vegetation, where the earth's crust is laid bare. Textures comprised of the marks left by the different tools used to apply the coloured pigments become obvious on close observation. Far from being flat monotonous blocks of colour, the gradients in tone and subtle textures are clearly evident in her work (Figure 30, page 173).

As Jacqueline gradually began to close in her forms – thus removing any suggestion of function, that they might be capable of holding flowers or branches as in much of her previous work, she then had to:

> Find for them another sense, another *raison d'être*'. She explained further that, 'Every piece of clay that I take, the way that I place it, progress, push it or hold it demands a presence, it corresponds with that which I in the moment give it, the form becomes another body which will try to create its space in the same way as music, a voice, a word.[43]

From this time on, the forms fulfilled a purely contemplative role. As she worked on an individual sculpture, Jacqueline was aware that each stage in the construction, each decision made on the building up of the structure took it in a specific direction, and when complete each form had to exist in its own right as an independent entity.

Concerning the process of making, Jacqueline approached her work as an artist – first making drawings:

> To start with, there are sketches, writings, captured outlines, traces necessary to advance in close conformity with the passing days. They suggest a direction, they draw a framework. The idea lies there, precise and imprecise as a yearning can be. Once the first lump of clay has been laid, I start unfolding the form.[44]

The process that Jacqueline used was not to start with detailed preparatory drawings from which pieces would be built directly. Instead, she continually drew series of sketches, not necessarily drawings of specific pieces to be made. She would then review these sketches periodically. Those that caught her attention were marked with a cross. When a sketch had

43. Carole Andréani, interview with Jacqueline Lerat 'Construire ce corps autre', *La Revue de la Céramique et du Verre*, No. 155, July/August 2007, pp.35–6.
44. Françoise de l'Épine, 'Jacqueline Lerat', *Ceramics Art and Perception*, Issue 46, 2001, p.34.

three crosses, as she explained 'then that is it, I must make the piece'.[45] This could be as long as a year or two after the original sketch had been drawn.

She constructed pieces gradually, frequently standing back to observe the developing form, as she explained, 'It is a face-to-face encounter with *a different body* in which thought and materials are mingled. Void takes shape, is intensely tightened. The hands keep moving from outside to inside.' She further explained that in sketches only one side of the work is sketched, which she called the front, 'The other side is the reverse of things which I have to find, the back that is hidden to the eyes, and I have to work out the passage from front to back in order to give it unity and make it exist.'[46]

Jacqueline did not stick rigidly to a pre-conceived (drawn) form; instead there was flexibility in the making process, the pieces evolved as she worked on them. With reference to Jacqueline's method of working, Jean-Roch Bouiller refutes the notion of the artist working in a gestural manner, instead describing her process as the 'assembly of elements', 'appropriation of space', 'actualisation of a drawing'.[47] Jacqueline's method of constructing her forms was in sharp contrast to a more random gestural approach that has been prevalent within ceramic sculpture since the 1950s, and is particularly evident in the work of Peter Voulkos.

In 2005 Jacqueline was invited to have a solo exhibition at Galerie Besson in London, and proprietor Anita Besson suggested the following year as a possible date. However Jacqueline did not agree, as Besson described, 'Her answer, ever optimistic, was that she would prefer two years to prepare as she needed the time to make enough pieces to fill her large kiln.'[48] Jacqueline's meeting with Besson and her subsequent solo exhibition at Galerie Besson were significant events in the later phase of her career. The exhibition was the first in a series *Trois Grandes Dames*, the other two artists being Betty Woodman and Karen Karnes (both U.S.A.). Frédéric Bodet, then a curator at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, wrote in the catalogue accompanying Jacqueline's exhibition:

45. Jacqueline Lerat in *L'être et la forme*, 2007.
46. Françoise de l'Épine, 'Jacqueline Lerat', *Ceramics Art and Perception*, Issue 46, 2001, p.34.
47. Jean-Roch Bouiller, 'Approche de L'Architecture', *Jacqueline Lerat*, 2012, p.92.
48. Anita Besson, 'Meeting with Jacqueline', *Jacqueline Lerat*, 2010, p.165.

> Jacqueline Lerat, whose achievements over many years have earned her a pre-eminent place in the French ceramics scene, knows that the essence of the sculptor's art can only be revealed through an intense physical complicity with the raw material. With this in mind then, it is obvious that her recent works, created painstakingly under the conditions that advanced ageing implies, can be interpreted as metaphors for her own frail body, just as they tell us that music and dance are the disciplines that have probably influenced most lastingly her artistic output.[49]

Writing in the catalogue for a subsequent (posthumous) exhibition of Jacqueline's work at the same gallery in 2011, her son François quoted an excerpt from Jacqueline's diary, written on unpacking work from her kiln in November 2006 in preparation for the 2007 exhibition: 'This is not perfection, but is that what I really want? In any case, I believe that these pieces possess a special quality with which each viewer can identify.' François explained that after the success of the exhibition, on returning home Jacqueline wrote 'with evident joy' in her diary, 'For so long now, it's been as though I was permanently obliged to prove I exist. It's been like an oppressive necessity, one that perhaps I was not totally aware of all the time, but certainly one which I never wilfully sought.' This comment on how she considered that her work was perceived suggests that Jacqueline, despite the high level of recognition that her work had received throughout the different stages of her career, felt that she had to continually struggle for its acceptance. After the exhibition at Galerie Besson she returned to her studio with renewed energy and continued working on new ideas and forms until prevented from doing so by illness in the year prior to her death.

Jacqueline signed her work 'Jacqueline Lerat' after Jean's death, rather than continuing to use the 'J.J. Lerat' signature, or changing to 'J. Lerat'. One of the most remarkable aspects of her career was that she worked in the same studio, using the same clays, and firing in the same kiln for over fifty years. Her work is deeply rooted in place, made of local La Borne clays and fired with wood from the local forests. As a body of work the pieces created in her later life are testament to her strong engagement with nature, her resilience, and the overwhelming urge to continue on her creative path, despite increasing frailty.

49. Frédéric Bodet, catalogue for Jacqueline Lerat's solo exhibition, Galerie Besson (London), June /July 2007. This essay was published as a preview in *The Log Book*, issue 30, 2007, pp.24–26.

### 4.4: How Jacqueline Lerat's work exemplifies 'The Quiet Touch of the Flame' – a subtle woodfire aesthetic and its capacity to evoke a sense of quietness

Woodfiring was a constant part of Jacqueline's practice throughout all the stages of her experience as an artist, from her arrival as a twenty-two year old to work and continue her training in pottery in La Borne in 1943, to the last firing she carried out in her kiln in Bourges in 2006. In the intervening sixty-three years, throughout each stage of the work she produced – functional, figurative, and abstract sculptural, woodfiring was an essential element.

The work that the Lerat's fired in their kiln in La Borne (1945–55) had been salt-glazed. In the new kiln in Bourges they salt-glazed from the time of the first firing in November 1955, until the eighteenth firing in June 1963. A decision to cease salt glazing was then taken, as they wanted the surface of the wood-fired pieces to be less glossy, given that much of their work was now more sculptural. From then on 'the quality of the wood played its role'. Jacqueline stated: 'Fire is indispensible, it is a partner, an alter ego. Each kiln has its characteristics, its particular atmosphere, it is a wonderful tool. For me it is not a hazard, it is only a lack of knowledge.'[50] This suggests that Jacqueline did not consider it a difficulty that the results of each firing could not be completely predicted. Instead she accepted that it was something unknown, a challenge in a positive sense.

The fact that Jacqueline had already been using this same kiln for over thirty-five years when she began producing the work that is being considered here, meant that she was intimately acquainted with its characteristics, knew which type of effects could be expected in particular areas, and could place her work accordingly. It is likely that even as she was constructing the forms she was already envisaging their positions in the kiln, and the effects that might be achieved there. She said of this aspect of the processes of firing:

> Shape and materials are one and the same, closely linked and always thought of, imagined, built with the idea of being ultimately brought face to face with fire, an exacting and cooperating partner. During the firing, the materials are allied, they change, some disappear, some are revealed.[51]

50. Carole Andréani, interview with Jacqueline Lerat 'Construire ce corps autre', *La Revue de la Céramique et du Verre*, No. 155, July/August 2007, p36.
51. François de l'Épine, 'Jacqueline Lerat', *Ceramics Art and Perception*, No. 46, 2001, p.34.

The kiln that Jacqueline Lerat used was a Sèvres design of 2m³. With this type of kiln the emphasis in not on achieving a heavy build up and melt of flyash on the surfaces of work. Instead, it is ideally suited to achieving soft, quiet effects. Given the design of the kiln – where due to its scale the firebox is positioned close to the chamber where the work is stacked, it could be expected that the ash deposits would be heavier on some areas of the surfaces of forms. This is obviously an effect that Jacqueline did not wish to achieve on her work, and in packing the kiln took preventative steps to protect it from these unwanted effects. An intricate structure consisting of sections of kiln shelves was constructed as a series of baffles to deflect the flame and thus protect the forms. Another strategy she employed was placing forms carefully in relation to the shelf supports used in packing the kiln, so that further surface areas were protected. Both of these strategies resulted in achieving paler tones, whereas areas that were more directly exposed to flame and flyash have somewhat darker tones, or as Jacqueline described the difference options, 'put the pieces in full flame […] let the fire have priority or, on the contrary, protect them for a more discreet complicity'.[52]

The packing of the kiln was therefore a complicated procedure, anticipating results in particular areas and taking steps to take advantage of this. As Jacqueline stated, from the first firing she and Jean recognised that 'each area of the kiln had its characteristics; very soon that seemed to us an advantage that we could make use of.'[53] At that time they had not yet found shelves that were suitable for firing to 1300°C in open flame. In the large traditional kilns in La Borne work was stacked in the chamber from floor to ceiling, without the use of shelves.

Jacqueline's work illustrated the appropriateness of the wood-fired effects that she achieved for her sculptural forms. The surfaces have a depth and life that draw the viewer in, the subtle variations in the earth tones contributing to the feeling of quietness and meditative mood of the work. The colours of the surface, all at the quieter end of the spectrum did not detract from the forms but complemented them. Thus we see that the

52. Jacqueline Lerat, 'Four Sèvres Kiln Log', *The Log Book*, issue 75, 2018, p10. English translation (by Coll Minogue) of 'Four Sèvres', by Jacqueline Lerat, published in French in *Paroles de Feu – les Fours à Bois en France*, Musée Bernard Palissy, 2000.
53. Jacqueline et Jean Lerat, *Les Fours*, ARgile, 1990, p.103.

soft quiet effects were eminently suitable for the type of work she created – and that the work has quiet qualities that go beyond surface.

While the term 'toasted' is often used in association with the tones, colours and effects achievable in Bourry-box kilns (which are essentially the same design as the Sèvres type kiln that Jacqueline used, with a few minor differences), the terms blushes, blooms, or subtle variations of tones might be more appropriate for visualising the actual effects achieved. The subtle flame markings can perhaps best be described as 'blushes' of colour. The word 'blush' is here being taken as meaning an area of colour or tone with softened edges that fade into the background colour, rather than a spot or other marking that has sharply defined edges and appears as a contrast to the background tone. These subtle fired variations perfectly complemented the texture of the clay in Jacqueline's hand built forms, whereas stronger, more obvious firing effects would have been a distraction. The variations in tone that she achieved in firing were generally within the ranges of subtle ochres and tans, ranging to paler cream coloured tones.

While the work of Pleydell-Bouverie and Hanssen Pigott could be said to possess similar connotations of stillness, much of Jacqueline's work of the period that is being discussed here, portrays a different kind of stillness. Inspired by dance and movement the forms capture a brief moment of balance that one senses may be difficult to achieve and maintain. There is a suggestion that this is not an on-going or permanent stillness, but a record of a brief moment, attained with difficulty, held, before letting go. The pieces also have the capacity to evoke a sense of quietness and invite contemplation on their predicament. These abstract forms have a meditative impact, which comes from the combination of form, subdued colour range and understated textural surface treatment.

When observing this work the first feature one notices is the clarity of form, or depending on the angle that it is being observed from, this can be preceded by a sense of a clearly defined profile. Then, drawing closer, one becomes aware of the evocative surface; noticing a variation in tone, a brighter area might attract attention. Then there is an awareness of the texture inherent in the surface. Finally, withdrawing one's gaze again to a slight distance, to consider the form in its entirety. These are not pieces to be glanced at hurriedly. They reward time spent in close observation and contemplation, just as they

came into being in a slow meditative process, as Jacqueline built up the forms, considering every stage in the development, referring back to the drawings in her sketchbook as work progressed.

What are the qualities that the work possesses that contribute to this mood of quietness? Visiting the major retrospective exhibition of Jacqueline's work held at the French National Ceramics Museum in Sèvres in 2012, the power of the forms was particularly evident in the gallery where the later work was displayed. The sculptures were positioned in the centre of the largest of the galleries with generous space all around. This arrangement and the lighting combined to create an overall ambience of calmness, in keeping with the mood of the individual forms.

The last body of work that Jacqueline created includes the most powerful of the pieces she made throughout the sixteen-year period under discussion here. These pieces are also amongst the most contemplative. Taking *Équilibre* (Figures 31, page 175), as an example, it is a simple form that has a distinct clearly defined profile composed of three elements. Its surface is quiet, as with all the pieces from this period. Darker tones toward the base lead to paler tones in the upper section. As the eye travels over the form more variation is perceived in the restrained tonal palette and subtle textures. It projects a sense of balance, calmness, and stillness.

Having first intended to become a painter, but feeling that her skills in drawing were not of a sufficiently high standard, Jacqueline turned to ceramics as her preferred means of expression. In her mature work she brought painting and ceramics together. Drawing provided the starting point for the forms of her abstract sculptures. She then brought her painterly skills to bear, creating surfaces appropriate for each form through her use of a wide range of coloured slips, pigments and added textures. The outcome was a natural range of earth tones. Had she left the clay body as the final surface to be affected by flame and flyash during firing, the results would have been very different and not as successful. It is the combination of form, worked surface texture and variation in tone that distinguishes Jacqueline's work from this late period. It is these characteristics that combined create a mood of quietude.

### 4.5: Jacqueline Lerat's work compared to that of her contemporaries

Jacqueline Lerat's work perhaps most readily bears comparison with that of her contemporaries who were also associated with the La Borne area, all of whom have made important contributions to the development of ceramic sculpture in France, and its acceptance within the field of contemporary sculpture. The work of this group was recognised in the 2018 exhibition *Les Pionniers de la Céramique Moderne* shown at Musée des Arts décoratifs de Bourges, which was designated *Une Exposition Exceptionelle d'Intérêt National* by the Minister for Culture for its remarkable character. The artists whose work was shown were – chronologically in the order in which they came to La Borne between the years 1941 and 1959, Jean Lerat (1941), André Rozay (1942), Jacqueline Bouvet (1943), followed by Vassil Ivanoff (who arrived in 1947), Pierre Mestre (1949), Elizabeth Joulia (1949), Yves Mohy and Monique Lacroix (1955), and Claudine Monchaussé (1959).

These young artists, who were all aged between twenty-three and twenty-nine at the time of their arrival in La Borne, came from all over France (Ivanoff, who was older was Bulgarian); were from diverse backgrounds; and had already trained in a wide range of artistic disciplines. They had come to La Borne for many different reasons, but mainly these were to do with the tradition, the quality of the clay and how it was transformed by woodfiring, the possibility of learning from the traditional potters who were still practicing, and the opportunity of availing of inexpensive studio space in workshops that were no longer in use.

The work of this new group included domestic scaled and monumental sculpture, utilitarian ware, and architectural pieces. Although living in the relative isolation of La Borne they kept up to date with national and international developments within the arts and the broader aesthetic movements of post-war Europe, by visits to galleries and libraries in Paris and subscriptions to national arts journals. Their concerns were in line with others artists of their time creating work that was appropriate for display both in domestic settings and within modernist architecture. They exhibited in galleries in Paris and frequently overseas, and entered and won prizes in international competitions.

The involvement of these artists in ceramics was not an isolated occurrence, but mirrored what was happening at around the same time, both during, and in the years immediately following the Second World War, in other areas of France and in other countries. Robert

Deblander (1924–2010) for example, was working in St Amand-en-Puisaye, and Antoine de Vinck (1924–1992) in Belgium. Some of the La Borne artists were involved in producing abstract pieces from the time of their arrival in La Borne, whereas for the Lerats this phase evolved from earlier stages of their work.

The work created by this new generation of potters was acknowledged early on and supported by curators and academics including the two figures already mentioned in relation to Paul Beyer's move in La Borne, who were responsible for collecting contemporary work from La Borne for the permanent collections of some of the major French museums. Jean and Jacqueline Lerat's work had been exhibited overseas as early as 1947, in the exhibition *Modern French Pottery*, which was shown in Birmingham, Stoke-on-Trent, Derby, and Swansea. Their work continued to be shown on a regular basis in the decades that they worked together, in Germany, Italy, Japan, Canada, and Belgium. In 1962 it was included in a major exhibition *Grès d'Aujourd'hui, d'Ici et d'Ailleurs* (Clay Today, from Here and Elsewhere) organised by, and first shown at Château de Ratilly in Yonne. This exhibition included pieces by Hamada, Leach, Yves Mohy, Daniel de Montmollin, Antoine de Vinck, and others. It later transferred to the *Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris* under the title *Maîtres Potiers Contemporains* (Contemporary Master Potters).

**The La Borne Movement**

The first exhibition to be shown outside of France that identified and recognised the significance of the work produced by the group of La Borne artists was *La Borne 1940–1980: A Post-war movement of ceramic expression in France*, which was shown at the Magen H Gallery, New York (USA) in 2012. In an essay by Maud Leonhardt Santini in the accompanying catalogue 'The La Borne Movement' is referenced throughout, and Jean and Jacqueline Lerat are cited as the founders of this movement.[54]

Leonhardt Santini argued that despite their disparate backgrounds and training the work of these early La Borne artists displays a cohesive identity and aesthetic. To add context to the work on display in the exhibition, pieces by the La Borne artists were shown in photographs in the catalogue in modernist interiors. The catalogue text concluded:

54. Maud Leonhardt Santini, *La Borne 1940–1980: A Post-war Movement of Ceramic Expression in France*, Magen H Gallery, 2012, p.30.

> Today the La Borne movement is gaining its rightful place and the recognition it deserves. Increasing numbers of works by La Borne artists are represented in exhibitions presented by major museums and galleries and they are gaining representation in public and private collections. Gallerists and collectors are leading the way through their collecting initiatives and guidance of iconic works into significant collections. The inclusion of these works is critical in telling a more complete story of the history of ceramics and the modernist movement.[55]

Comparing the work of the La Borne artists with that of Peter Voulkos, Leonhardt Santini states that, like Voulkos, they had 'demolished the hierarchies between the fine arts and craft, and […] inspired generations of ceramicists to discover artistic freedom through clay'.[56] The emergence in France and the West Coast of the USA in the late 1950s and early 1960s of ceramic sculpture as a field in its own right, distinct from function, is a subject that merits in-depth research.

On an international level Voulkos is probably the artist whose work most readily comes to mind in the context of wood-fired ceramic sculpture, in that he was undoubtedly the best-known personality working within this field from the late 1970s. The influence of this work continues today, not just in the USA but also internationally.

While Voulkos' work and that of Jacqueline Lerat may appear to be diametrically the opposite of each other, similarities exist. In Voulkos' wood-fired work (Figure 8, page 51) and Jacqueline's (see for example Figure 31, page 175) the method of making is clearly evident in the work of both. Voulkos' exuberant, extrovert and expressionistic approach to construction – often carried out as a performance type event in front of an audience. Jacqueline's work built up slowly and considered in the privacy of her studio, in what one can imagine was an absorbed and meditative process. Both making asymmetrical irregular forms, Voulkos continuing to reference the vessel however obliquely, Jacqueline ceasing to do so entirely in her later work. The effects of firing are clearly evident on the work of both, Voulkos' often displaying heavy build-up of ash effects after several days of firing in an anagama. Jacqueline's representative of the much quieter and subtler effects resulting from a shorter firing cycle in her Sèvres kiln. Each method of firing is totally in keeping with the forms. Voulkos' pieces speaking primarily and a record of the process of making; Jacqueline's referencing movement, balance, nature, architecture, and other favourite

55. Ibid., p.67.
56. Ibid., p.65.

themes. While Voulkos' work is often large in scale, Jacqueline's forms are more personal and intimate and rely on other characteristics for their power.

Of the three makers in this study, Jacqueline Lerat probably had more of an immediate connection and involvement with contemporary art movements, which extended beyond her own work. From 1986 to 2008 she was president of the CEDC (*le Centre d'études et de dévelopment culturel*) a cultural development organisation, which facilitated a contemporary art gallery 'La Box'. The first exhibition, shown in La Box was an installation by the American video artist Bill Viola.[57]

### 4.6: The influence and legacy of Jacqueline Lerat's work

Having created her last sculpture *Brique et Pentagone* in November 2008 (Figure 32, page 177), Jacqueline Lerat died on 3rd February 2009 – the sixty-fourth anniversary of her wedding, at her home in Bourges. This form, and other work that remained unfired at the time of her death, were fired in her kiln by colleagues, friends and family in September of that year.

In his opening remarks for the posthumous exhibition of Jacqueline's work shown at Galerie Besson in London in March 2011, David Caméo *Directeur Général* of Sèvres – Cité de la Céramique stated that in the two years since Jacqueline's death her work had 'become the subject of an extended homage, a touching reflection of the esteem and admiration her legacy inspires'.[58] Within a little over a year after her death a major retrospective exhibition of Jacqueline's work was shown in the gallery of the newly opened Centre Céramique Contemporaine de La Borne (CCCLB). A book *Jacqueline Lerat – Une œuvre en mouvement*, was published to coincide with the exhibition.

In 2011 a retrospective exhibition of work by both Jean and Jacqueline was shown at L'Ecole Nationale Superieure des Beaux-Arts in Bourges, where they had taught. The homage to Jacqueline has continued. Another retrospective, on an even larger scale than the two previous exhibitions, was shown at Sèvres Cité de la Céramique, in Paris, in October 2012, and was part of an extensive series of events celebrating her life and work.

57. *Jacqueline Lerat*, 2010, p.161.
58. David Caméo, catalogue of Jacqueline Lerat exhibition, Galerie Besson, 2011.

This exhibition, extended through several galleries, traced the different stages in the development of Jacqueline's work. The first room was devoted to sources and places (*les lieux sources*) – Mâcon and La Borne; three sections of the next gallery included – *L'Art populaire*, establishing in Bourges (*l'installation a Bourges*) and involvement in education (*l'enseignement*). Next was *L'art sacré*, and finally, the largest space was devoted to the later abstract work. Also exhibited were some of Jacqueline's sketchbooks, drawings, paintings, archive photographs, newspaper cuttings, and a collection of books from her extensive personal library. One of the events coinciding with the exhibition was a special firing in one of the huge Sèvres kilns of pieces from the Lerat's first studio in La Borne, which had remained there unfired, since their move to Bourges in 1955.[59] All of these elements contributed to providing an insight into Jacqueline's life and work. The exhibition had a further showing at the Musée de Beaux-arts et d'Archéologie Joseph Déchelette in Roanne.

It is remarkable that within three years of her death, three large-scale retrospective exhibitions of Jacqueline's work (as well as a number of smaller-scale ones) had been mounted in major venues, including the National Ceramics Museum of France. Additionally two books dedicated to her work were published, in which there is detailed analysis and discussion, together with biographical documentation, placing her life and work in the context of the broader political and artistic landscapes of her time.

The press release for the Sèvres exhibition contained a statement that indicates the respect that is felt for Jacqueline as an artist in France:

> An emblematic figure in the world of ceramics, Jacqueline Lerat (1920–2009) achieved by a rare œuvre, demanding, internalized, always enlightened by a lively reflection, to reach all areas of the contemporary art field. From sacred art to architecture, through sculpture, painting, graphics, photography, design, poetry, rare are the creative fields that have not, in recent decades, benefited from one or more close links with the work of Jacqueline Lerat.
>
> Through her founding role in the evolution of La Borne, her teaching and her network of students, her work of a rare formal and intellectual rigor, Jacqueline Lerat is among the potters who have had the greatest impact on the French art scene after World War II.[60]

59. For an account of this firing, see 'Firing a four de Sèvres', by Robert Sanderson, *The Log Book*, issue 52, 2012, pp.22–25.
60. From the Communiqué de Presse for the exhibition, *Jacqueline Lerat, L'Être et la Forme*, Sèvres National Ceramics Museum, 2012.

In the intervening seven years since this statement was made the homage to Jacqueline has continued, as different aspects of her life and practice continue to attract the attention of scholars and academics from different fields.

In 2009 the small publishing enterprise *Éditions ARgile*, established by the ceramic artist Camille Virot and his wife Pascaline produced the book, *8 artistes & la terre*. Jacqueline Lerat was one of those included and had sent the written material for her contribution to the book shortly before her death. Her inclusion in this publication, and the exhibition that eventually resulted from it, which was shown at Musée Ariana in Geneva, Switzerland, in 2013, is significant in many respects. In the press release for the exhibition the selection of artists is described as being 'representative of the diverse French ceramic scene at the turn of the twenty-first century'. It continues:

> The ceramic practices of the 8 have been constantly shifting and evolving over the course of their careers, interwoven with renewed and repeated questionings. They work on the fringes of formal research, pushing back the technical boundaries again and again in order to exploit the astonishing plasticity of the material and to sculpt space.[61]

Jacqueline was the oldest artist included in these two projects by over two decades, all the others being born in the 1940s. The work of the other seven artists could be described as being experimental in nature, in some instances incorporating a range of materials, in others using clay or *terre* in its unfired state in the creation of installations. It is another indication of the status in which Jacqueline is regarded in France that her work was chosen for this exhibition. The book is a documentation of the work and philosophies of eight contemporary French artists, who have not decided to try working in clay to create a new and different body of work – almost as something of an experiment – as several major artists have done, but instead they have consistently worked within the medium throughout their careers.

Jacqueline combined a career as a ceramic artist with teaching at the L'Ecole des Beaux Arts in Bourges from 1966 to 1988, where her husband Jean also taught. As educators, 'individually and together, Jean and Jacqueline influenced generations of French students,

61. *8 artistes et la terre*, Musée Ariana, Geneva, Switzerland, March 27–Sept. 8, 2013, curated by Isabelle Naef Galuba, Director of the museum.

and those who came from overseas to study with them.'[62] Many of their former students subsequently settled in the La Borne area, and established studios that incorporated woodfire kilns.

In the catalogue of the 2011 Galerie Besson exhibition, David Caméo wrote about Jacqueline's role as a teacher:

> She not only lovingly transmitted a corpus of knowledge and techniques, but far more importantly, instilled in her students the imperative need to seek the essential of all things, in nature, in works of art, in one's personal conduct, and to follow that path of sensitivity and openness that would nourish a life ethic favourable to the creation of fine art.[63]

In guiding her students in this manner, Jacqueline was passing on to them the principles on which she had based her own practice.

Jean Lerat worked in La Borne for fourteen years and Jacqueline for twelve. After their move to Bourges they continued to be identified with La Borne and maintained close links with many of the potters and artists there. Given that they were not in La Borne very long, their names continued to be associated with the village, and their impact on the continued development of ceramics in the region is well acknowledged. They chose to retain their studio there, and many remaining unfired pieces of their work. Retaining the studio could be considered as maintaining a symbolic link with La Borne. In more pragmatic terms, the old studio provided a useful and convenient location for the storage of large quantities of the local clay, which they both continued to use throughout their subsequent careers in Bourges.

Some sources already referenced in this thesis credit Jean and Jacqueline Lerat with the resurgence of ceramics in La Borne. The arrival of Jean Lerat in 1941 at the invitation of François Guillaume, is cited as being the single most significant occurrence, which eventually led to the 'renaissance of La Borne', as an important centre for contemporary ceramics:

62. Special supplement on La Borne, published in *La Revue de la Céramique et du Verre*, No. 118, May–June 2001, p.xxviii.
63. David Caméo, catalogue of Jacqueline Lerat exhibition, Galerie Besson, 2011.

> Without François Guillaume's patronage, Jean Lerat might never have been brought into contact with the expressive possibilities of wood-fired stoneware, the technique which had for three centuries been the very *raison d'être* of La Borne, and which is still today the hallmark of La Borne ceramics. And without Jean Lerat the history of the village might indeed be very different.[64]

In the catalogue to the exhibition 'Renaissance', which he mounted in his commercial premises *Maison Guillaume* in Bourges, in December l948, the purpose of which was to honour those who were responsible for the renaissance of pottery in La Borne, François Guillaume stated that it was Jean Lerat and Jacqueline Bouvet Lerat who had *l'honneur de révéller le flambeau* (the honour of revealing the flame).[65]

The artist Bernard Dejonghe wrote in the catalogue of Jacqueline's 2007 solo exhibition at Galerie Besson:

> At the 1962–3 exhibition *Maîtres Potiers Contemporains* at the *Musée des Arts Decoratifs* in Paris, I saw the works of Jacqueline and Jean alongside those of Shōji Hamada, Bernard Leach, Francine del Pierre and many others […]. What distinguished the works of Jacqueline and Jean was their radical break from the ceramic traditions of thrown pottery, domestic-ware or decorative objects. Their work had a great, expressive strength produced directly by the fire and the clay.[66]

In developing their work away from functional pottery and representational figurative sculpture into completely abstract forms, the Lerats were at the forefront of the emergence of abstract ceramic sculpture in France. This development was inextricably linked to their practice of woodfiring and the qualities that the process imparted on their sculptural forms. They played an important role in the resurgence of woodfiring in France, and were instrumental in the development and spread of the use of the *four de Sèvres* (Sèvres kiln), the design of which they adapted to a scale and format that was suitable for use by studio potters. As such, it became popular in France in the post-war period and is still widely in use today. The members of the group who are now regarded as 'Les Pionniers de la Céramique Moderne – La Borne' also chose to work within the genre of wood-fired ceramic sculpture. The Lerats and their contemporaries took the use of clay to new levels and succeeded in

64. Synopsis in English of the two main essays by Christophe Lemarchand and Frédéric Bodet in a special supplement on La Borne, published in *La Revue de la Céramique et du Verre*, No. 118, May–June 2001, p. xxviii.
65. Patrick M. McCoy, *Renaissance de La Borne*, unpublished PhD thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 1991.
66. Bernard Dejonghe, quoted in the catalogue for the 2007 exhibition at Galerie Besson, London.

redefining the field of ceramics. They inspired numerous artists who came after, influencing their choice of wood-fired ceramic sculpture as a medium of expression.

Of the three makers whose work is being considered here Jacqueline Lerat's work has undoubtedly been the subject of most attention since her death, a fact which is due in no small part to her son François and his wife Esther Martinez. The entire year of 2018 was designated 'l'Année J.J. Lerat 2018' in a promotion that included exhibitions, conferences, seminars, presentations of work to international and national museums, and publications, all aimed at insuring that the work of Jean and Jacqueline Lerat continues to be recognised.

**Conclusion**

Jacqueline Lerat's work created during the final stage of her career is considered by many to be her most powerful and personal. At the time of the major retrospective exhibition shown at the national ceramics museum, *Cité de la Céramique*, in 2012, it was stated in the Press Release that, 'After 1992 Jacqueline continued with her work alone, gradually pursuing concepts of abstraction and figuration, which transcends perfectly mastered colour-material and refined over time, which assured her an international reputation.'[61]

Through the various stages of Jacqueline career she produced different ranges of work, each of which was both successful and innovative within the context of the time it was made. While continuing to work within the parameters of a limited number of materials and processes she was constantly expanding their expressive potential. What is widely regarded as her strongest work – and to which most space was allocated at the 2012 retrospective, was produced in the last sixteen years of her life, when she was aged between 72 and 88.

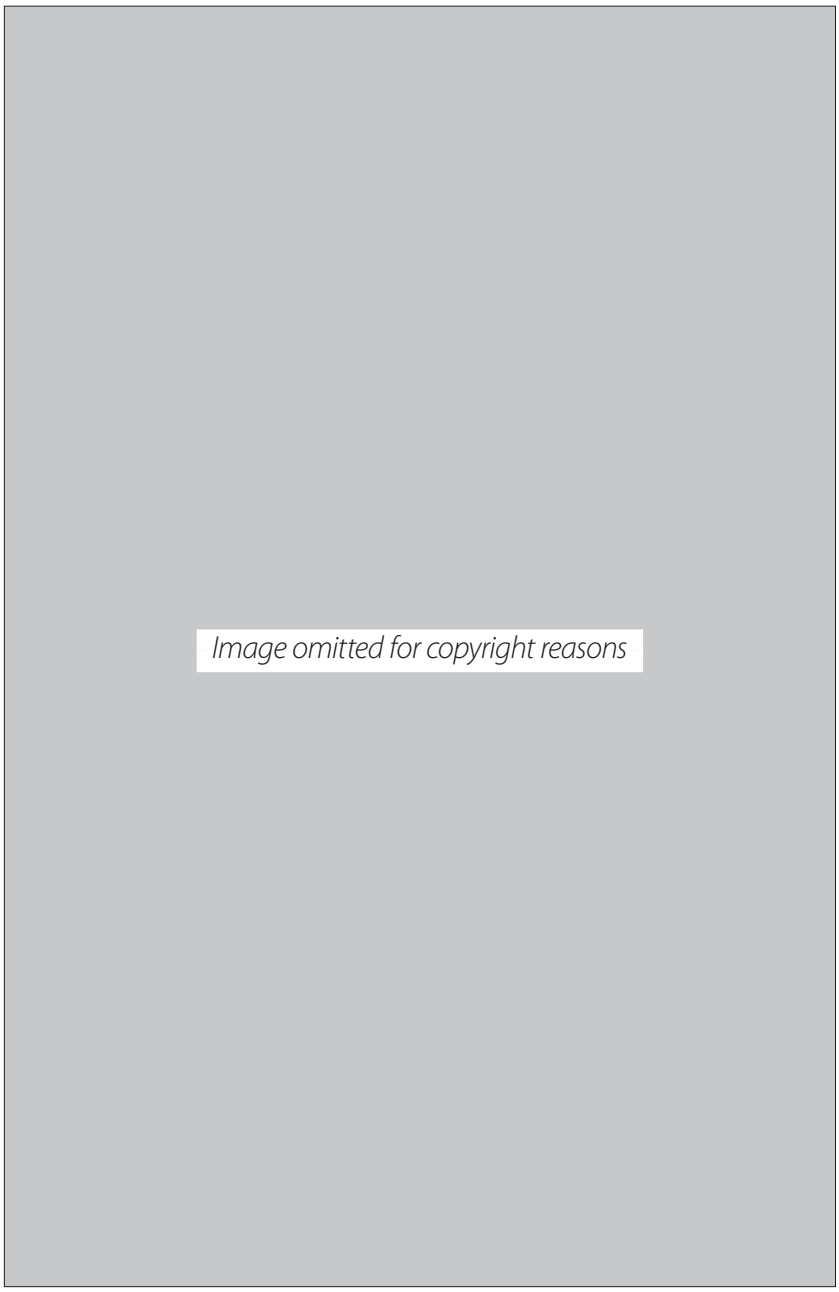
Of the three potters/artists in this study, Jacqueline's work stands apart. While both Pleydell-Bouverie and Hanssen-Pigott concentrated on the glazed surface, Jacqueline achieved her particular effects by working directly onto and into the base clay body, thus creating an integrated surface that had variations of both texture and colour. Having worked with the same kiln for over fifty years, she knew the range of fired results that she could achieve. Rather than simply relying on the natural fired surfaces, she chose specific colour effects for

61. From the Communiqué de Presse for the exhibition *Jacqueline Lerat*, *L'Être et la Forme* – Sèvres, 2012.

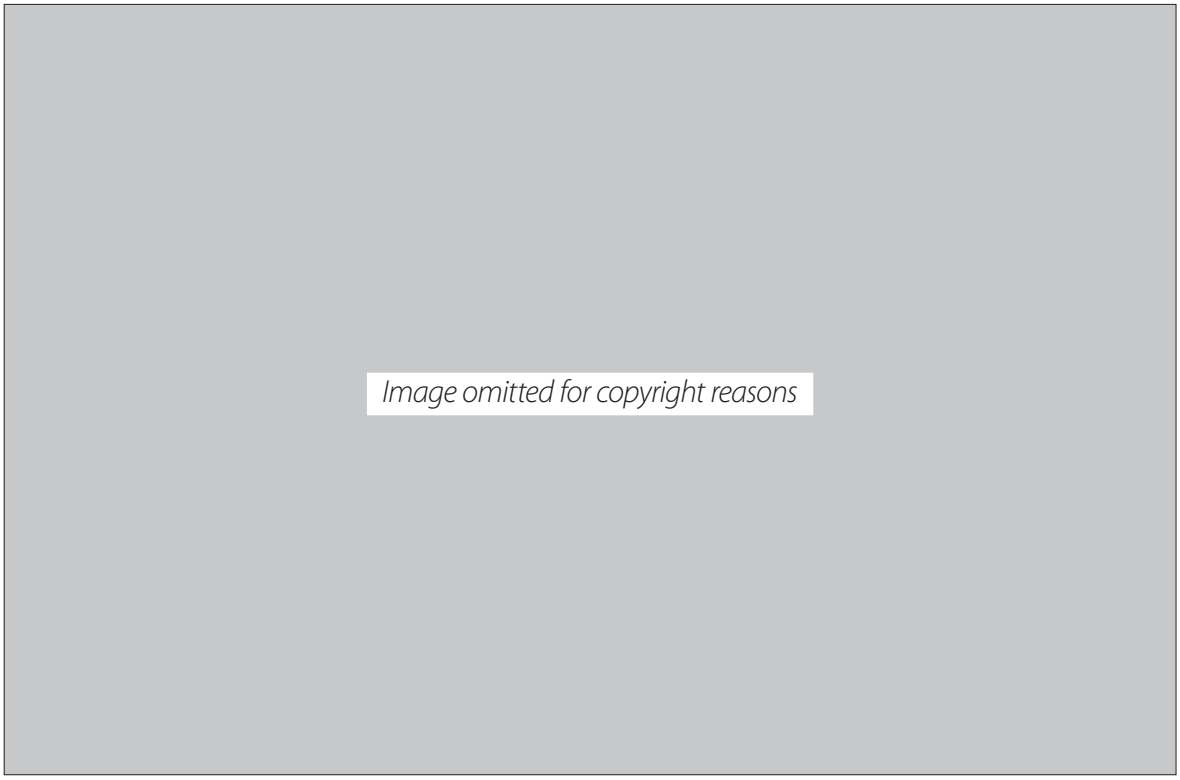
each form that were totally appropriate. It is these complexly worked but seemingly simple and quiet natural surfaces that distinguish her work from that of her contemporaries.

Observing the different styles of work from the various periods of her career on show at the 2012 retrospective in Sèvres, walking from room to room, noting the development from the naïve and somewhat rustic figures of the 1940s and early 1950s, to the religious figurative sculptures of the 1950s, and on to the abstraction of the later pieces, the chronological progression was evident. The later work has a presence and power informed by Jacqueline's knowledge, understanding and appreciation of modern art and architecture, as well as music and dance. The technology she worked with in terms of the kiln she used was French, as were the materials. Her initial inspiration was the traditional pottery of the La Borne area, but she used these tools and materials to create work, that while capable of evoking a mood of transcendent calm, is international in its outlook and timeless in feeling.

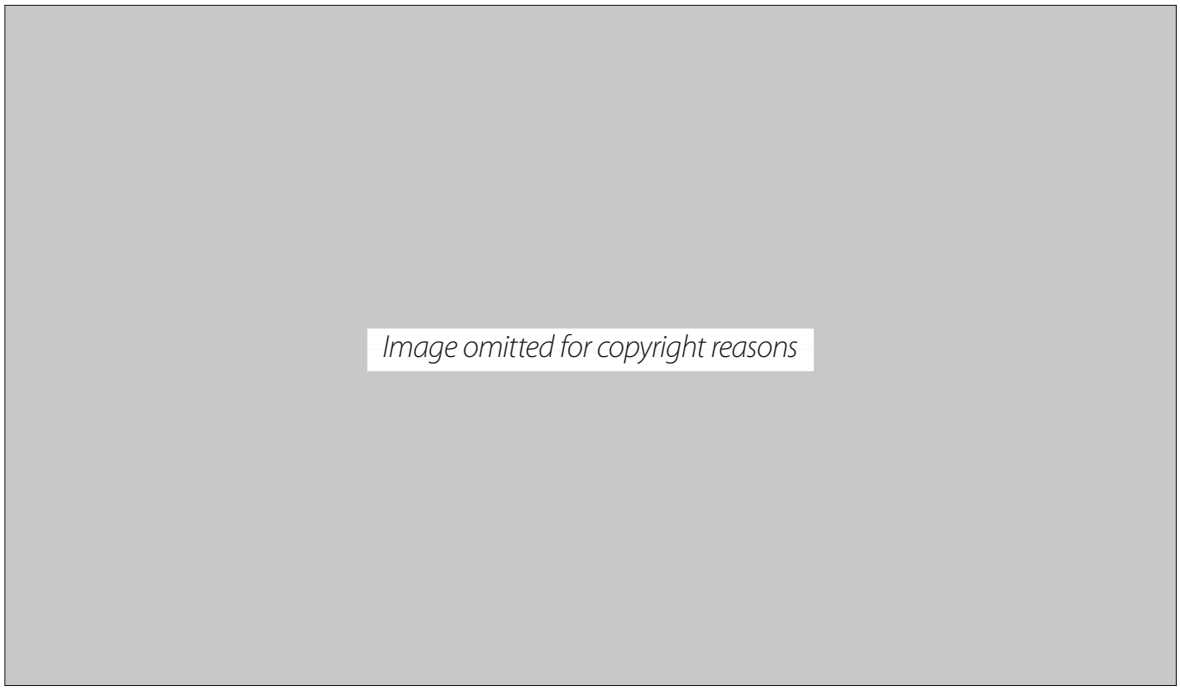
# Chapter 5
# Gwyn Hanssen Pigott



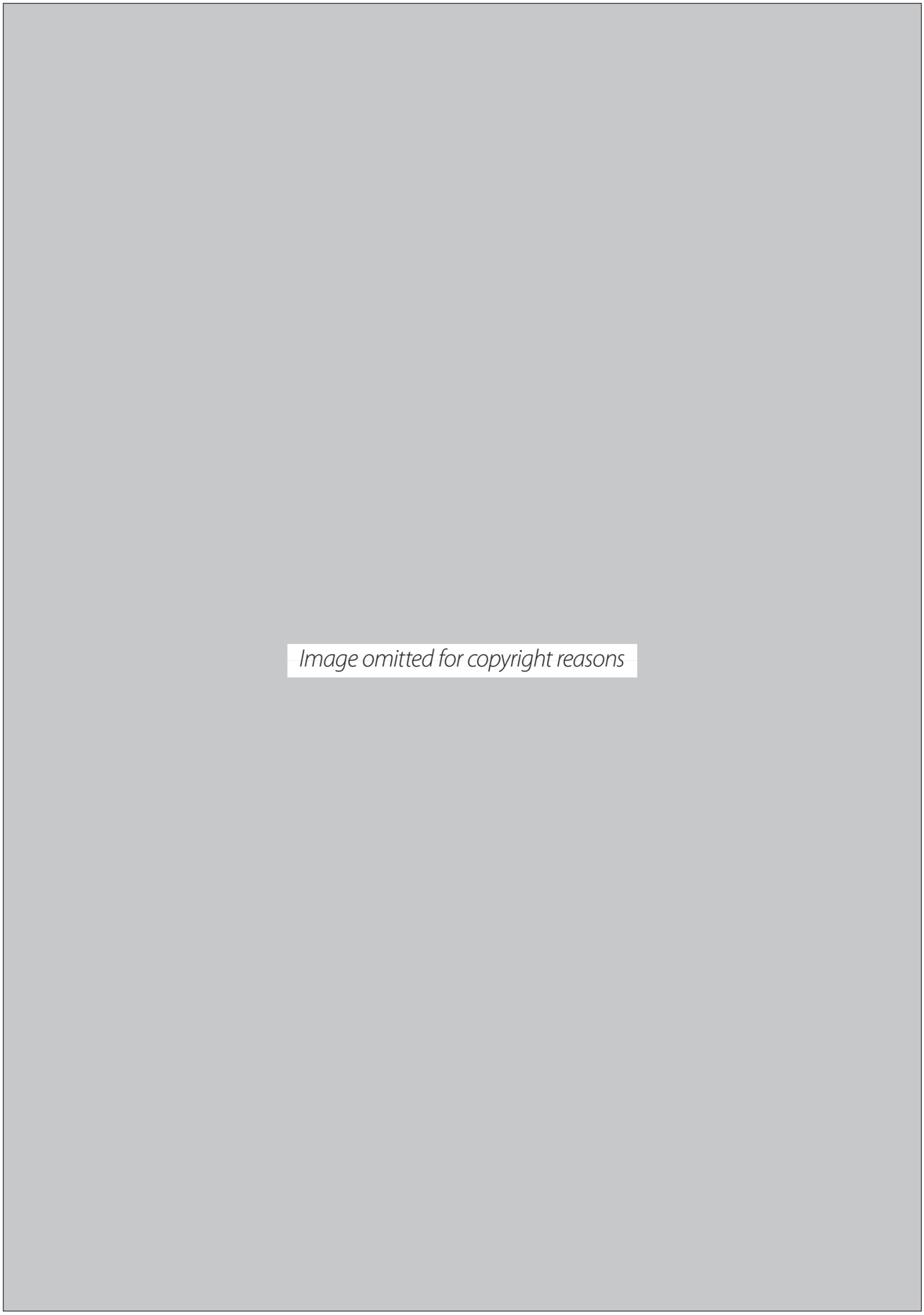

**34.** Gwyn Hanssen (Hanssen Pigott) unpacking the kiln at Wenford Bridge Pottery, Cornwall, 1964/65. (Image source: Minogue and Sanderson Wood-fired Ceramics Archive.)



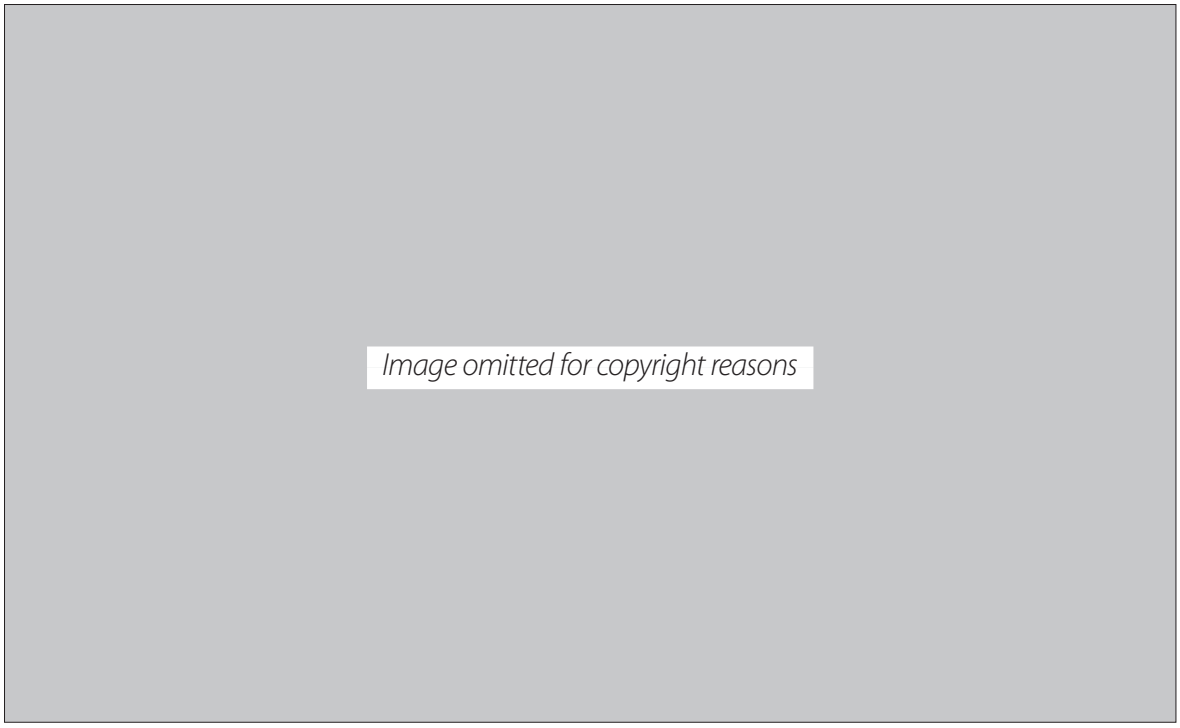

**35.** *Bowl*, by Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, 1963, 4.2cm in height. Oxidised porcelain. (Image source: *Gwyn Hanssen Pigott A Survey 1955–2005* exhibition catalogue, National Gallery of Victoria.)



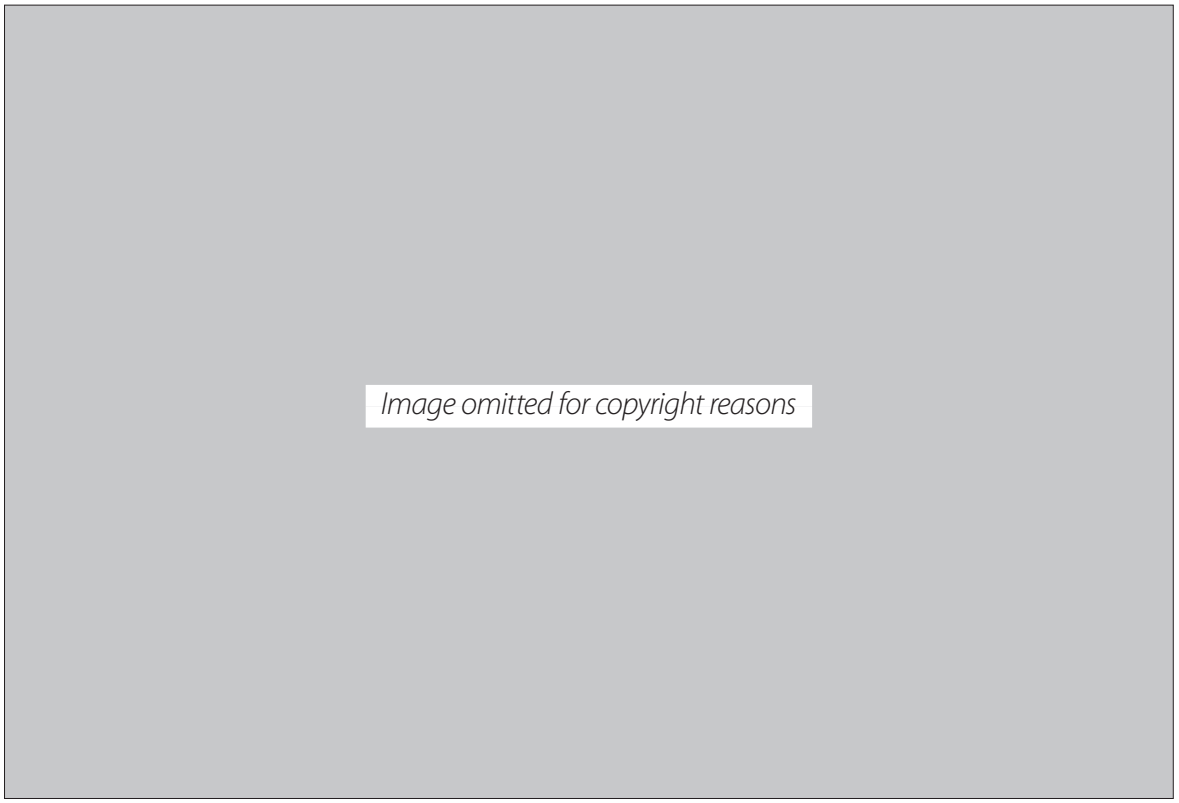

**36.** *Bowl*, Northern Sung dynasty (960-1127), 7.5cm in height.  North China , Hebei province. Stoneware (Xing ware). (Image source: *Gwyn Hanssen Pigott A Survey 1955–2005* exhibition catalogue, National Gallery of Victoria.)



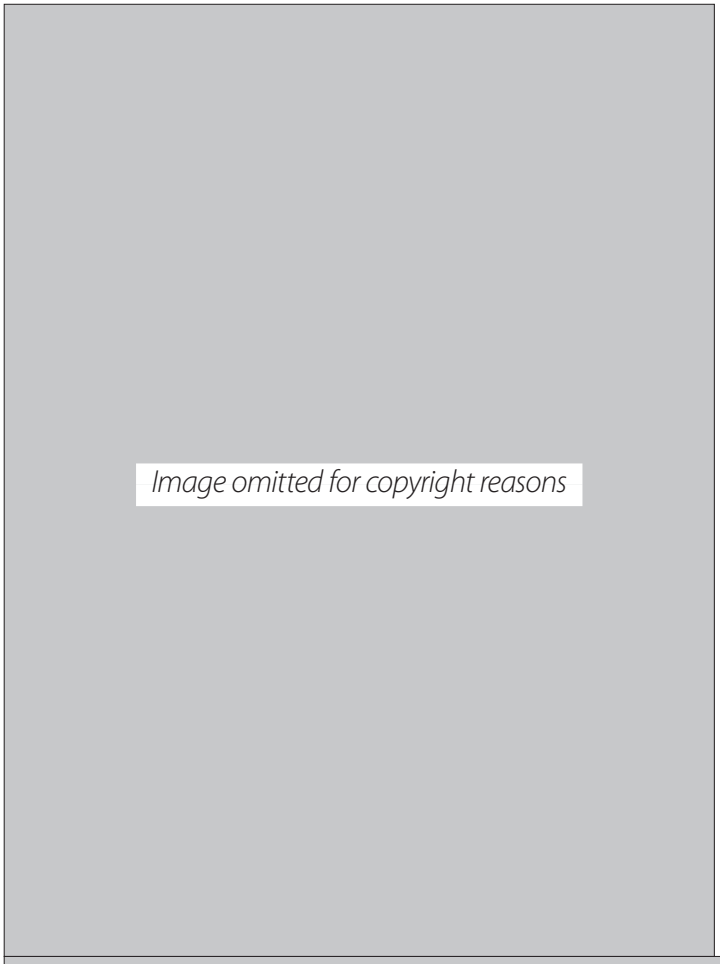

**37.** Gwyn Hanssen (Hanssen Pigott) in her studio at Les Grandes Fougères, Achères, France. Cover of *Ceramic Review*, No. 11, Sept./Oct. 1971. (Photographer not credited.)



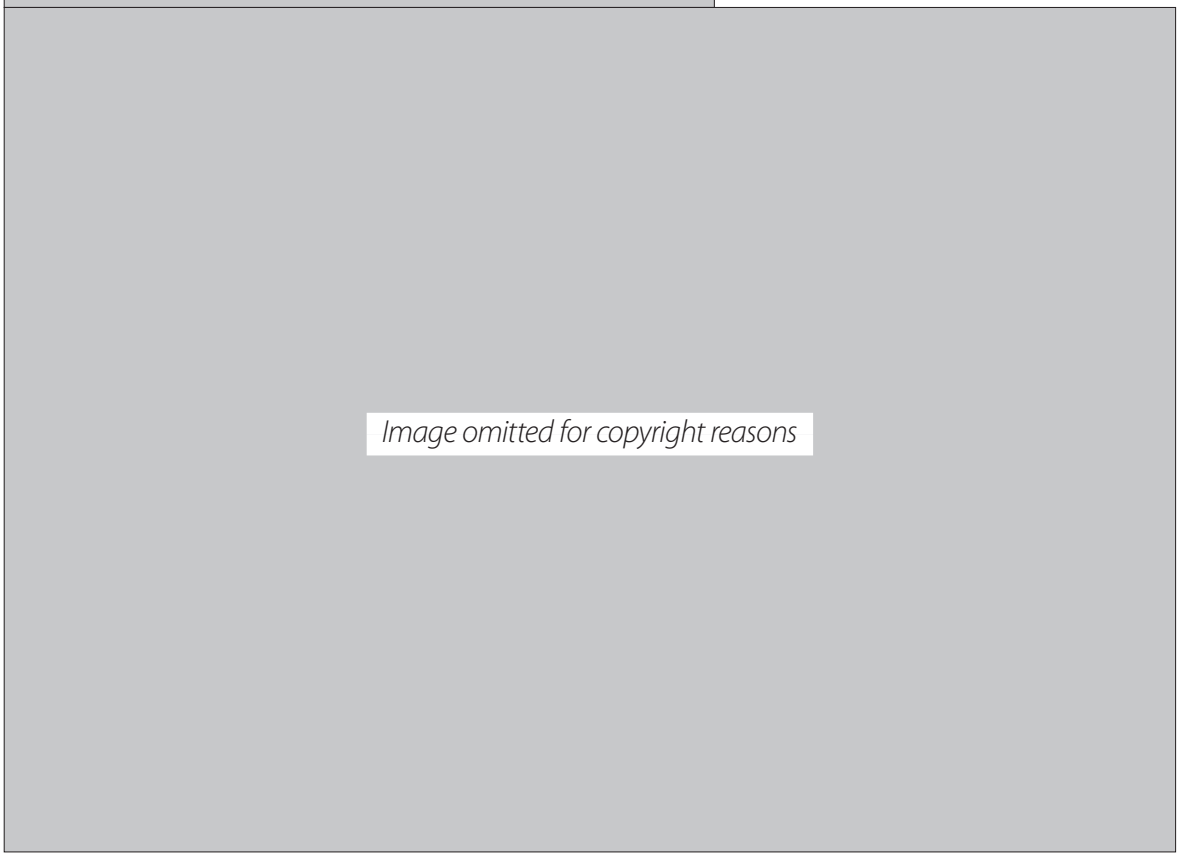

**38.** *Bowl*, by Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, c.1971, 7.9cm in height. Salt-glazed stoneware, made at Les Grandes Fougères, France. (Image source: *Gwyn Hanssen Pigott A Survey 1955–2005* exhibition catalogue, National Gallery of Victoria.)



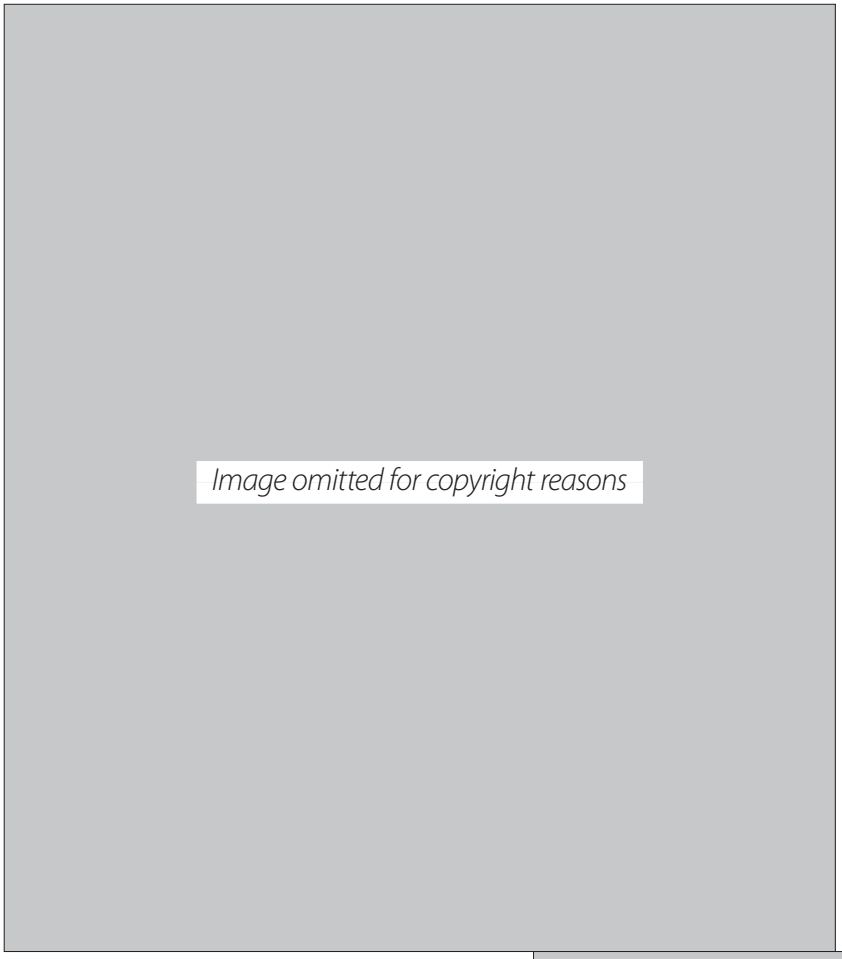

**39.** *Coffee drinking bowl*, by Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, 1968–73, 8cm in height. Stoneware, made at Les Grandes Fougères, France. (Image source: *Gwyn Hanssen Pigott A Survey 1955–2005* exhibition catalogue, National Gallery of Victoria.)




**40.** *Still Life – two bottles and a bowl*, by Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, 1988, 28.4 x 22.5 x 22.0cm (overall). Porcellaneous stoneware, made at Kelvin Grove Queensland, and wood-fired in Heja Chong's Bizen type kiln at Cottles Bridge, Victoria. This was Hanssen Pigott's first still life arrangement. (Image source: *Gwyn Hanssen Pigott A Survey 1955–2005* exhibition catalogue, National Gallery of Victoria.)

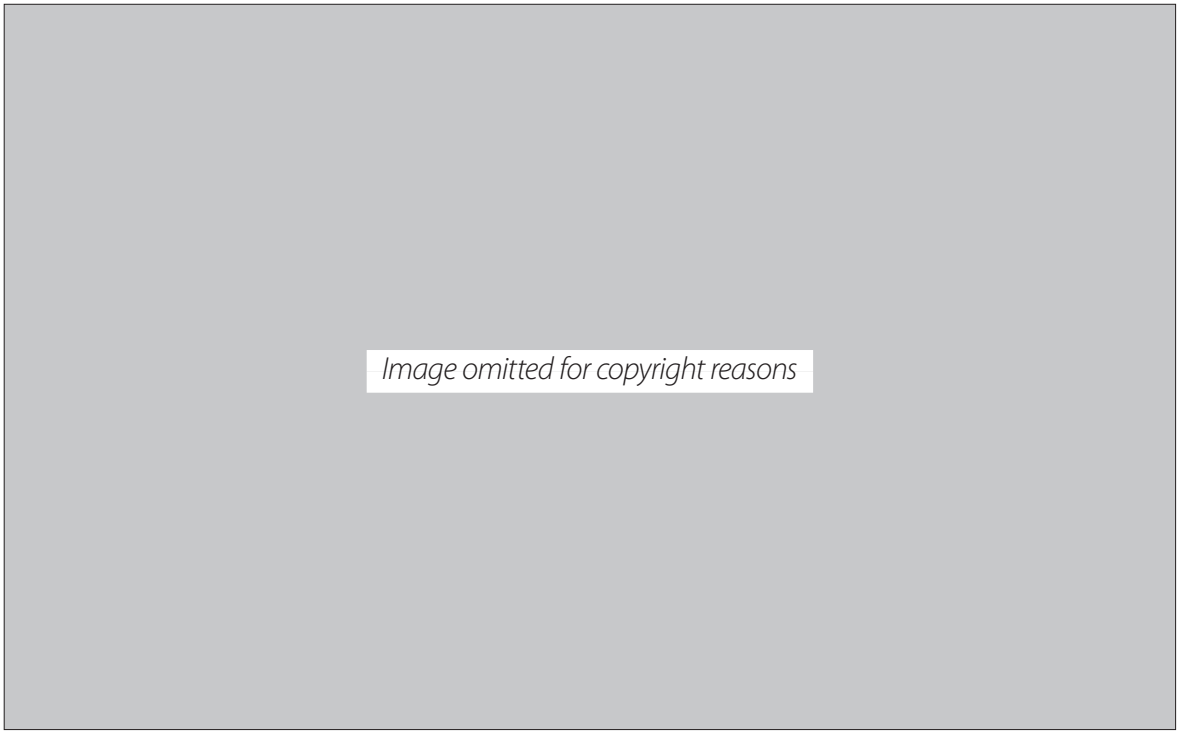



**41.** *Still Life*, by Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, 1988, 25 x 28.1 x 11.5cm (overall). Stoneware, wood-fired in Heja Chong's Bizen type kiln. (Image source: *Gwyn Hanssen Pigott A Survey 1955–2005* exhibition catalogue, National Gallery of Victoria.)

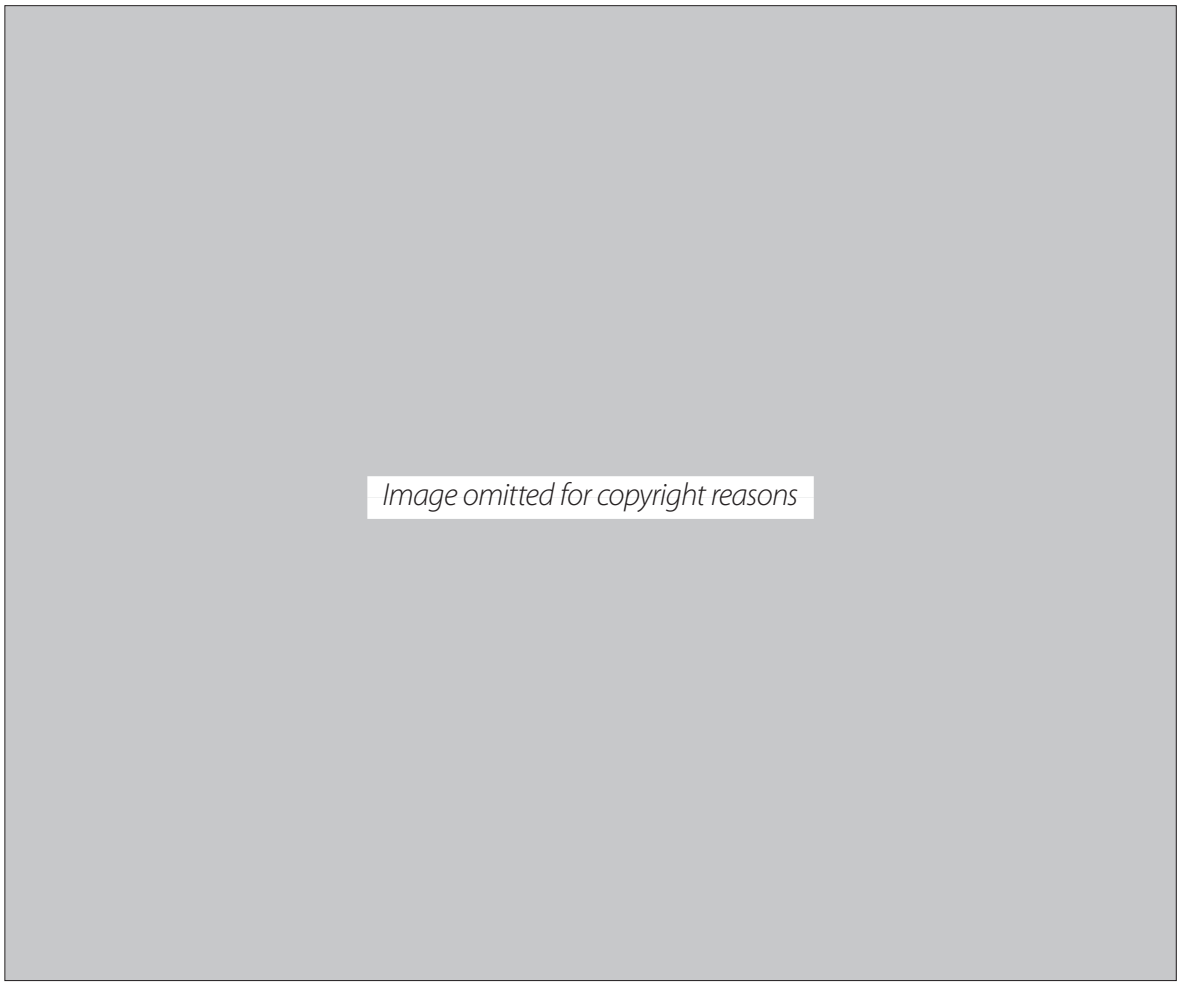



**42.** *Still Life*, by Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, 1991, 18.3 x 22.2 x 20.6cm (overall). Porcellaneous stoneware, made at Netherdale. (Image source: *Gwyn Hanssen Pigott A Survey 1955–2005* exhibition catalogue, National Gallery of Victoria.)

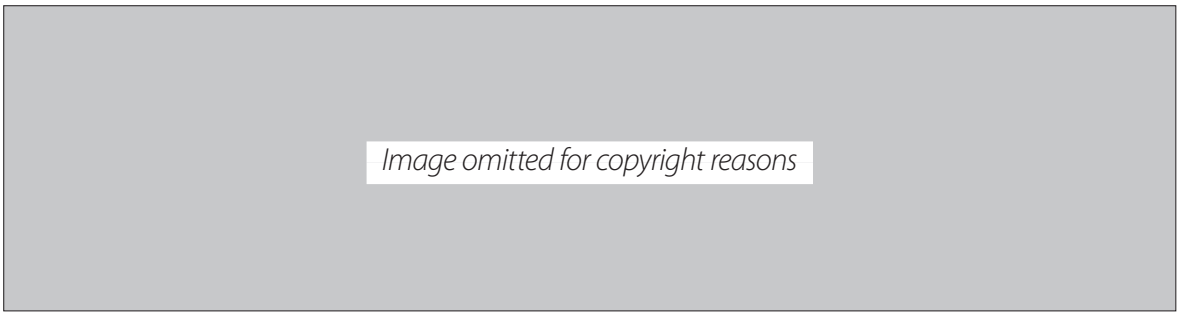

**43.** *Still life,* by Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, 1989. Wood-fired porcelain. Made in Netherdale, Queensland. Shown at Garry Anderson Gallery, Darlinghurst, Sydney. In the Collection of the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. (Image source: from the exhibition invitation card.)




**44.** *Bowl*, Southern Sung dynasty (1127-1279), 5.2cm in height. Zhejiang province South-east China. Stoneware, Longquan ware. (Image source: *Gwyn Hanssen Pigott A Survey 1955–2005* exhibition catalogue, National Gallery of Victoria.)



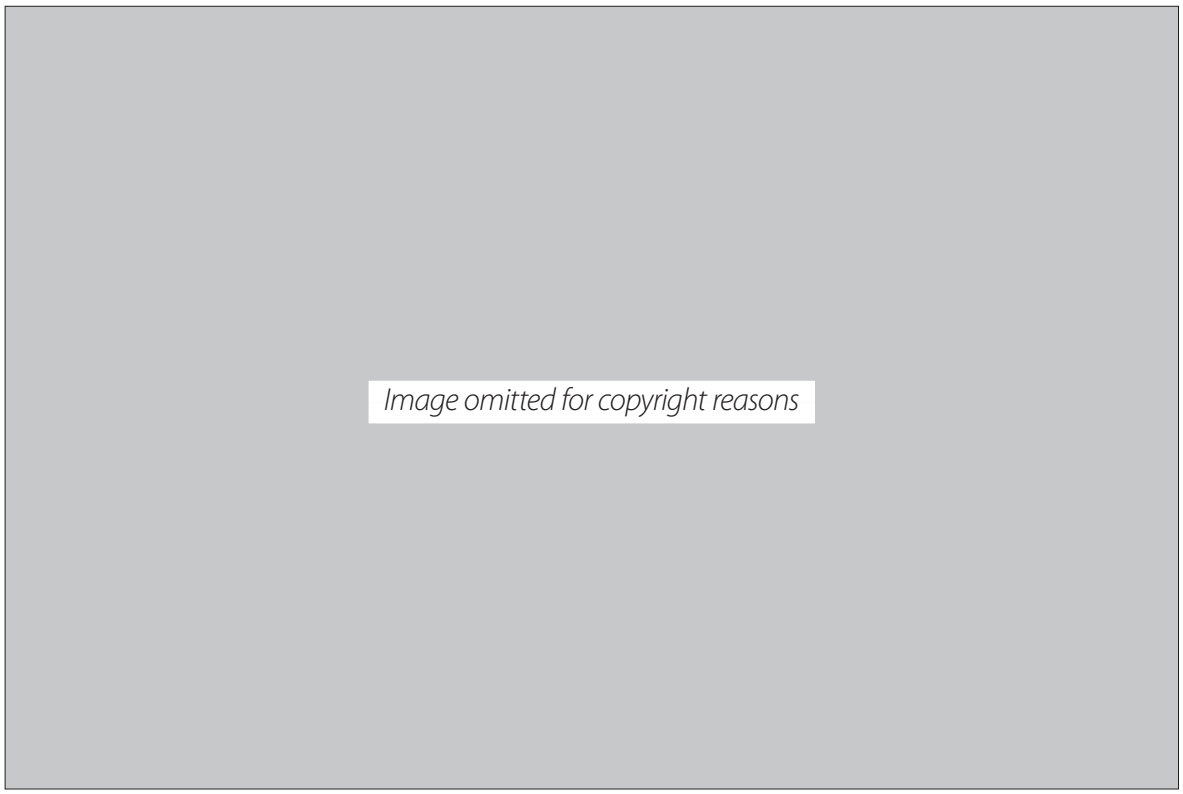

**45.** *Shell*, by Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, 11 x 21.8 x 16.8cm. Wood-fired Limoges porcelain.
(Image source: *Gwyn Hanssen Pigott A Survey 1955–2005* exhibition catalogue, National Gallery of Victoria.)



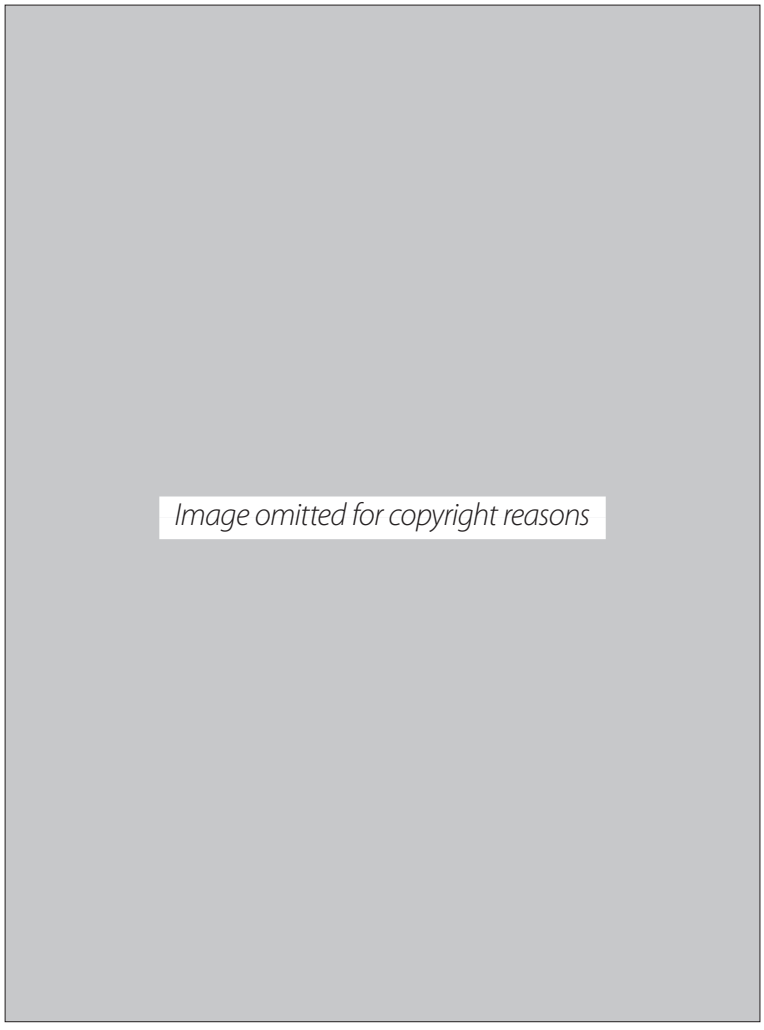

**46.** *Exodus II*, Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, 1996, 14.4 x 155.0 x 15.5cm (overall). Wood-fired porcelain, made at Netherdale, Queensland. In the collection of the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.
(Image source: *Gwyn Hanssen Pigott – A Survey 1955–2005* exhibition catalogue, National Gallery of Victoria.)


**47.** *Caravan – a parade of beakers, bottles, bowls, jugs and cups* (detail), by Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, 2004, an installation at the Tate St Ives Gallery, St Ives, Cornwall. On a scale larger than any of Hanssen Pigott's previous arrangements, this installation comprised of pieces drawn from collections worldwide.
(Image source: Tate St Ives exhibition catalogue, 2004.)


**48.** *Fade with Four Bowls (Yellow, Sand, Cream, White)*, by Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, 2007, 137 x 16.2 x 16cm (overall).
(Photograph: Brian Hand. Image source: *The Log Book* archives.)




**49.** *Still Life with Beaker*, by Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, 2007, 51 x 30 x 16cm (overall). (Photograph: Brian Hand. Image source: *The Log Book* archives.)




**50.** Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, packing the Bourry-box kiln at her studio in Ipswich, Queensland, Australia, 2007. The kiln had two doors and could be packed from both sides, making packing a less strenuous process. (Photograph: Aarti Vir. Image source: *The Log Book* archives.)

## Chapter 5: Gwyn Hanssen Pigott

### Introduction – chapter overview

Of the three artists whose work is examined in this study, Gwyn Hanssen Pigott was undoubtedly the most widely known during her lifetime, certainly in the English speaking world. Throughout her long career she produced many different ranges of work, and a high standard of technical skill was evident from her earliest pieces. For much of her career Hanssen Pigott led a peripatetic lifestyle, and did not generally stay at any one location for more than a decade. However, in each workshop she quickly established a new practice, which in almost every instance included building a woodfire kiln, and in a short space of time she was soon producing work to her usual high standard, despite the challenges implicit in the use of different materials and kilns. Hanssen Pigott achieved most recognition for the body of work she produced from the late 1980s to the time of her death – still life installations composed of inherently functional forms. In these arrangements of pots, all of which could still function as such, Hanssen Pigott succeeded in achieving work that was capable of evoking moods of quietness and stillness.

### 5.1: Biographical narrative as context for Gwyn Hanssen Pigott's work

Gwyn Hanssen Pigott was born Gwynion Lawrie John in Ballarat, Victoria, Australia on 1st January 1935, the second of four sisters. The John family was of Welsh origin and Hanssen Pigott's father was the director of a large engineering firm. Her mother trained as a teacher of arts and crafts and was also described as an amateur potter. Hanssen Pigott would later recount her experience growing up in a house that was 'choc-a-block with lead-light windows, turned wooden vases, hand-painted parchment lampshades, watercolour still-lives, tapestry fire screens, crocheted tablecloths, hand-made earthenware pottery – coiled, slabbed and thrown – and one or two copper spittoons, all scrupulously made by my mother'.[1] However, she also stated that she did not remember going to an art gallery until she went to university.

At secondary school Hanssen Pigott enjoyed drawing and reading. It was whilst studying for a degree in Fine Arts (the equivalent of Art History today, rather than Fine Art studio

1. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, 'Autobiographical Notes', *Studio Potter*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 1991, p.46 (henceforth 'Autobiographical Notes, 1991').

practice) and English Literature at Melbourne University that she first became interested in pottery and pots. When visiting the National Gallery of Victoria it was necessary to walk through the gallery in which the Kent Collection of pottery was on display in order to reach the European painting galleries, which were relevant to her studies. The Collection, which mostly consisted of Sung Dynasty Chinese and historic Korean pieces, also included pots by Leach and Cardew. Gradually Hanssen Pigott 'became curious about the quality of beauty which they had' and which she 'began to love'.[2]

In 1954, having determined to write her third year thesis on pottery – the requirement was that it had to be on an Australian subject – Hanssen Pigott set out to visit potters and art schools in Victoria and New South Wales. She already knew Harold R. Hughan (1893–1987), one of the earliest studio potters in Australia, who introduced her to Bernard Leach's *A Potter's Book*. Later she met Peter Rushforth (1920–2013) – another of the pioneers of Australian studio pottery, and through him heard about Ivan McMeekin (1919–1993). Hanssen Pigott described her first visit to meet McMeekin:

> By this time I was hungry for good pots and his home was full of them: the wonderful bowls we ate from, the lively pots he had made, exuberant Cardew pots, and the Chinese and South-east Asian pots he had collected.[3]

While serving in the British merchant navy in China, McMeekin had developed an interest in and become a collector of Chinese pottery and porcelain, particularly those of the Sung Dynasty. Having decided to learn to make pots, he had travelled to England in 1949 to visit the Leach Pottery in Cornwall. However, he was not offered a place at the pottery, as there was an extensive waiting list of people wanting to work there. Instead, he visited Cardew to assist with the first firing of his newly extended kiln.[4] McMeekin stayed at Wenford Bridge for some three and a half years, which included managing the pottery as a junior partner for two years, while Cardew was working in Nigeria.[5]

2. Margaret Tuckson, 'Gwyn Hanssen Pigott', *Pottery in Australia*, Vol. 22, No. 2, Nov/Dec 1983, p.6.
3. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, Autobiographical Notes, 1991, p.46.
4. Cardew had then recently added a down-draught first chamber to the existing up-draught chamber of the kiln that he had built on his relocation to Wenford Bridge in Cornwall in 1939/40.
5. Ivan McMeekin, 'In His Own Words', *Ceramics Art and Perception*, issue 13, 1993, p.61 (published posthumously).

McMeekin returned to Australia in 1953 and the following year established Sturt Pottery for the Sturt Association in Mittagong (NSW). Here he set about identifying and testing indigenous raw materials, which would be suitable for producing both stoneware and porcelain bodies, and Chinese inspired high-temperature glazes.[6] At this time in Australia the raw materials necessary for producing pottery were not readily available. From the time that the first colonies had been established towards the end of the eighteenth century, through to the 1940s, all of the pottery produced from native materials was earthenware. Working in stoneware was a matter of trial and error for the early stoneware potters, as it was necessary to find and test combinations of locally available materials until suitable clays and glazes could be developed.

McMeekin built a small round woodfire kiln with a single Bourry-type firebox for firing his clay and glaze tests. He had gained experience firing the large Bourry-box type kiln at Wenford Bridge, and the modifications he made to the design incorporated many significant improvements.[7]

Rather than spending a further year at University to complete an honours degree, Hanssen Pigott instead opted to be examined for a pass degree, so that she could leave at the end of her third year and undertake training with McMeekin, who eventually agreed to take her on, initially on a trial basis as a student assistant. Thus, having graduated with a Bachelor of Arts Degree she moved to the small town of Mittagong, NSW, in 1955, to begin what turned out to be a three-year apprenticeship with McMeekin at Sturt Pottery.

Together Hanssen Pigott and McMeekin continued the work that he had begun, prospecting for and testing local materials. McMeekin would later state that 'Gwyn made a great contribution to Sturt – she sympathised with and understood the research, with its historical and philosophical aims'.[8] On another occasion he recalled that 'the wonderful thing about Gwyn as an assistant was not just that she could do the work and did it well

6. Taped interview with Ivan McMeekin (22nd Nov. 1965), in the Hazel de Berg collection of the National Library of Australia. http://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/1801756 Accessed June 2016.
7. Ivan McMeekin, 'A Wood Burning Kiln', *Pottery Quarterly*, No. 18, Summer 1958, pp.59–66. Also see 'The Bourry Box', by Ivan McMeekin, published in the proceedings of *Woodfire '89*, international woodfire conference held in Gulgong, NSW, Australia, April 1989, pp.61–66. Reprinted in *The Log Book*, issue 51, 2012, pp.21–27.
8. Quoted in Margaret Tuckson, 'Gwyn Hanssen Pigott', *Pottery in Australia*, Vol. 22, No. 2, Nov/Dec 1983, p.7.

and enthusiastically, but that she shared the excitement and the vision and valued the thing itself as much as I did, for itself'.[9]

After completing her apprenticeship Hanssen Pigott, then aged 23, and eager to gain further experience in pottery set out to travel to Britain, and arrived in January 1958. She had heard much about Cardew from McMeekin, and hoped to work at his pottery in Wenford Bridge. Cardew, however, was about to return to Nigeria to continue his work at the Pottery Training Centre in Abuja, which he had established in 1951. It was agreed that Hanssen Pigott would work with him at Wenford Bridge during his next visit home on leave sixteen months later.[10] She then hired a bicycle in London, and perhaps mirroring McMeekin's journey made nine years earlier, set out with the Leach Pottery in St Ives as her eventual destination, carrying with her a small celadon glazed porcelain bowl made by McMeekin at Sturt, and sent by him as a gift to Leach.

On what must have been a somewhat circuitous journey, Hanssen Pigott visited Winchcombe Pottery in Gloucestershire, and Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie at Kilmington Manor in Wiltshire. She also visited collections of ceramics including the Oriental and Islamic collection of Sir Alan Barlow, an eminent collector and long-term president of the Oriental Ceramic Society, at his home in Sussex. Anther stop was the Collection at the University College of Wales at Aberystwyth, to see 'the great Welsh slipware dishes there, and the early galena-glazed Cardew pots, and early, Leach, Nora Braden, and Pleydell-Bouverie treasures'.[11]

Between 1958 and 1959 Hanssen Pigott spent nine months working at Winchcombe Pottery; five months at St Ives, and four months at Wenford Bridge, where she assisted with preparations for the 'Geology for Potters' course that Cardew ran in the summer of 1959. Based on his experiences in Africa, this information would form the basis of his book *Pioneer Pottery* published in 1969. Hanssen Pigott typed out his lectures from the original

9. From the opening remarks made by Ivan McMeekin at the solo exhibition of work by Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, at the Potters' Gallery, Sydney, November 1985. Copy accessed in the Gwyn Hanssen Pigott Archive in the National Gallery of Australia, August 2015 ('GHP Archive / NGA'). When the author accessed the archive it had only recently been acquired and had not yet been documented.
10. Tanya Harrod, essay 'Portrait of an Artist as a Young Woman 1935–1973', *Gwyn Hanssen Pigott – a survey 1955–2005*, exhibition catalogue, National Gallery of Victoria, 2005, p.11 (henceforth '50 year survey catalogue').
11. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, 'Autobiographical Notes', 1991, p.46.

handwritten versions, and also accompanied him on preparatory explorations to clay mines and quarries for the field trips that took place during the course.

At the Leach Pottery Hanssen Pigott worked producing the Standard Ware range of pots. She made many friendships at this time that would continue well into the future. One of these was with the Canadian potter John Reeve (1929–2012), whose work Hanssen Pigott greatly admired. In his biography of Janet Leach, discussing her years as manager of the pottery in the period from 1956 to 1962, Emmanuel Cooper wrote:

> As a matter of principle Janet tried to ensure that […] students would try out all the shapes, not just the ones they found easy, yet she spotted what each potter was best at and sought to match shape to character. When Gwyn John […] an able potter […] found beer tankards difficult she was given smaller, more meticulous items such as soup bowls and mugs, at which she excelled. With John Reeve, another careful potter, a useful collaboration was set up whereby, on lidded pots, he threw the bases while she produced the lids. So precisely were each of the parts made that they fitted perfectly.[12]

At Winchcombe Hanssen Pigott was 'more an employee than a student',[13] carrying out various pottery chores as well as making some of the smaller pots from the production range. Her time there coincided with a change over from producing earthenware, as Cardew had done, to making stoneware and she was involved in testing some of the new glazes for stoneware firings in an oil-fired kiln.

During her time at both Winchcombe and St Ives Hanssen Pigott was encouraged to produce some work of her own, particularly at St Ives, where the trainees were free to make individual pieces in the evenings. This is a topic that Hanssen Pigott refers to several times during her last taped interviews (in the British Library 'Craft Lives' series), explaining that she did not feel any desire to make her own work at this time as she considered that she was not mature enough in the craft to do, and 'was still learning the language'. Instead she was more than happy to be gaining as much experience as possible in a workshop situation, wanting to practice her throwing so that she could make the required shapes of the standard ware better, and was pleased to be making things that people wanted. She did not at that time consider herself an individual potter and did not feel any need to express

12. Emmanuel Cooper, *Janet Leach A Potter's Life*, Ceramic Review Publishing, 2006, p.70.
13. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, 'Autobiographical Notes', 1991, p.47.

herself. In this she differed from her fellow trainees who had been to art school. Nor did she have a vision of the pots that she wished to make in the future, and considered that her personal work would develop in time.[14]

Hanssen Pigott had met the Canadian poet and writer Louis Hanssen at St Ives, when he visited fellow Canadian John Reeve. They married in December 1959 and moved to London, where they set about establishing a studio together in two rooms in a basement off Portobello Road in Notting Hill. With no previous experience of pottery, Louis learned from Hanssen Pigott and soon became proficient.[15] Whilst she was establishing her studio with Louis, Hanssen Pigott spent periods working with Alan Caiger-Smith at Aldermaston Pottery in Berkshire. She and Louis then worked in their own studio on a full-time basis and produced tableware fired in an electric kiln, selling to Heals and Liberty, as well as the newly opened Crank's restaurant. They also exhibited at Henry Rothschild's Primavera Gallery.

Even at this early stage in her career Hanssen Pigott was recognised for the quality of the work she produced, not only by those who bought it, but also by her fellow potters (Figure 35, page 223). Although still only in her mid-twenties, she was exhibiting in the best galleries and shops in London – a remarkable achievement for somebody who had arrived from Australia just two years previously, at the end of a three-year apprenticeship.

Hanssen Pigott began teaching at West Surrey College of Art and Design in Farnham during this period, and continued working there as a visiting lecturer until 1972. She also taught at Harrow School of Art. Having separated from Louis Hanssen (in 1963), who had established a studio of his own in Hampstead, and continued working as a potter until his death in 1968, Hanssen Pigott spent from March 1964 to October 1965 at Wenford Bridge, while Cardew was again in Nigeria. During this time she fired the large round down-draught kiln six times (Figure 34, page 221), and it was here that a breakthrough came in her woodfire practice, when for the first time she fired some of her work exposed to flame and flyash. She bought large silicon carbide shelves and shaped silicon carbide kiln props and packed some work on open shelves in the centre of the kiln. Some pots were fully glazed, others only partly so,

14. British Library National Life Stories Collection: Crafts Lives – Hanssen Pigott, Gwyn. Recorded on 24th/ 25th/ 27th June and 2nd July 2013. https://sounds.bl.uk/Oral-history/Crafts (henceforth 'BL/CL Gwyn Hanssen Pigott').
15. Conversation between Gwyn Hanssen Pigott and the author, at Hanssen Pigott's home and studio, Ipswich, Queensland, Australia, 7th May 2013.

and while they were protected from the brunt of the fire by the bagwall and surrounding saggars, the ash effects were obvious, 'the fine ash gave a particularly lovely bloom on glazes which were designed with high alumina, high silica and low flux.'[16]

At Wenford Bridge Hanssen Pigott was already making plans to move to France to establish a pottery. Explaining the background to this decision she described the impact of seeing a traditional oil jar from La Borne whist visiting Pierre Culot (1938–2011) at his home in Belgium during the Christmas holidays in 1962. Culot had worked with her at St Ives, and shortly after his death Hanssen Pigott wrote on the web site dedicated to him:

> He told me about La Borne and the pots from Haut-Berry and even drove me all the way down there, to introduce me to potters there. When we were approaching La Borne, coming through the winter forest of dark, bare, trees, he said to me 'how do you like your future home?'. I was astonished, but a seed was born and not long after I settled in Cher for nearly eight years. It was Pierre also who first told me about Giorgio Morandi, a painter who became very important in my work.[17]

Hanssen Pigott also went to Paris to see the historical survey exhibition *Potiers de Haut-Berry* showing at the Musée National des Arts et Traditions Populaires (Museum of Folk Art and Tradition).[18] At this time she had a strong desire to work somewhere where she would be free to fire with wood.[19] She visited La Borne again in 1963 and rented a workshop from Lucien Talbot, a retired traditional potter. The pots that she made were fired in Anne Kjærsgaard's kiln at Neuvy-deux-Clochers, not far from La Borne. Hanssen Pigott returned the following year accompanied by American potter Warren MacKenzie (1924–2018) and Canadian potter Glenn Lewis (born 1935), both of who had also worked at the Leach Pottery.

Other visits to France followed, and it was on one of these occasions that Hanssen Pigott took the step of buying a former bakery in the hamlet of Les Grandes Fougères, near Achères, 12.5 kilometres west of La Borne. On her return to England she took back clay samples to test in the kiln in Wenford Bridge, and began designing the kiln that she would build in France. Her intention at that stage may have been to establish a large communal

16. Gwyn Hanssen, 'Woodfire: a little history, and a few thoughts', *Woodfire '86*, proceedings of the 1986 Gippsland Australian National Woodfire Conference, p.28.
17. http://www.pierreculot.com/impressions.php Accessed 21/11/2011.
18. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, 'Autobiographical Notes', 1991, p.49.
19. Eileen Lewenstein and Emmanuel Cooper, 'Gwyn Hanssen Talking', *Ceramic Review*, No. 11, 1971, p.4.

studio based on the Leach Pottery model, to be shared with her international colleagues, but this plan did not materialise. However, it is known that MacKenzie provided a loan to partly finance the building of the kiln at Achères.[20]

Having spent the southern winter of 1966 touring New Zealand, giving workshops and talks, Hanssen Pigott moved to France later in the year and began renovating her 300 year old house and establishing a studio. She has written at length of her reasons for going to France to live and work, and these are closely connected to her admiration for the traditional pottery produced in the Haut-Berry region. When she first became aware of these pots she 'was excited to find what seemed to be a living tradition of wood-fired stoneware of quite considerable sensitivity and variety'.[21] Firing with wood again, she wanted to have the opportunity of making tableware in quantities that had not been possible within the restrictions of the small kiln in her studio in London.[22]

The village of Achères had been one of many pottery villages in the area, but by the 1960s there were no longer any traditional potters working there. The village of La Borne, which had most potters employed at the height of the popularity of pottery from this region, was the only one where some traditional potters remained active. Writing in *Pottery in Australia* in 1969 Hanssen Pigott explained that, even in the intervening years since her first visit in 1963, the range of traditional pots being produced in La Borne had decreased and the quality of those still being made had declined.[23]

It was a year before it was possible for Hanssen Pigott to start producing work, and the first firing of the new kiln took place in 1968. It was a large three-chambered climbing design with an overall packing space of 5m³, and the capacity to hold up to 1,000 pots. Some 11,000 second-hand bricks were used in the construction, all of which had to be cleaned by hand prior to use. The size of this kiln is large by any standards – compared for example with the kiln at the Leach Pottery, which had a total capacity of 9m³, and where a team of potters worked to fill and fire it on a regular basis, making production ware, in addition to

20. Gwyn Hanssen, letter to Warren McKenzie, dated July 14, 1967 (from Les Grandes Fougères, Achères, par Henrichemont 18, France), published in *Thrown – British Columbia's Apprentices of Bernard Leach and their Contemporaries*, the University of British Columbia, 2009, p.226.
21. Gwyn Hanssen, 'The Potters of Haut-Berry', *Pottery in Australia*, Vol. 8, No. 2, Spring 1969, pp.7–13. Reprinted in *The Log Book*, issue 47, 2011, pp.15–21.
22. Gwyn Hanssen, *Woodfire '86* proceedings, p.28.
23. Gwyn Hanssen, *Pottery in Australia*, 1969, p.13.

Leach's individual pots. Hanssen Pigott's kiln can be considered particularly large when one takes into account that it was primarily used by one studio potter, working alone most of the time. She did however occasionally have help from visiting students, and always had assistance when firing. The kiln was fired two to three times a year with firings lasting from twenty seven to thirty six hours. When asked about the size of the kiln during an interview with the editors of *Ceramic Review* in 1971, Hanssen Pigott stated that if building it again she would make it 'about one cubic yard, one fifth the size of the present one'. She continued: 'I saw myself as always working in a team. I had not really considered all the complications of working as a team in France.'[24]

The climbing aspect of the chambers of this kiln was no doubt inspired by the kiln built at the Leach Pottery in St Ives in 1924, which, although originally designed to be fired with wood, had already been converted to firing with oil by the time that Hanssen Pigott worked there. It is significant that she did not incorporate the same type of firebox of traditional Japanese design in her kiln. Instead she opted for a design of European origin with which she was already familiar – the Bourry firebox, and the version that she built was based more on McMeekin's adaptation of the design rather than Cardew's.[25] Hanssen Pigott continued to incorporate this type of firebox in almost all of the woodfire kilns that she subsequently built and fired.

The kiln did not have a brick bagwall and instead Hanssen Pigott used rows of saggars as protection, with pots packed on open kiln shelves behind.[26] She had acquired a large quantity of secondhand plate and bowl saggars from a factory in nearby Vierzon, and used them in firing her own glazed plates and bowls. The photograph on the cover of *Ceramic Review* in which the article about her work was published in 1971, shows Hanssen Pigott in her workshop with saggars stacked high all around her (Figure 37, page 225). Firing using this combination of saggars and open shelves, allowed for different effects to be achieved in 'the slower cooled protected wares and the fine ash deposit over bodies and vitreous slips of the exposed pots'.[27]

24. 'Gwyn Hanssen Talking', *Ceramic Review*, 1971, p.5.
25. Letter from Gwyn Hanssen to Warren McKenzie dated July 14, 1967, published in *Thrown – British Columbia's Apprentices of Bernard Leach and their Contemporaries*, 2009, p.226.
26. 'Gwyn Hanssen Talking', *Ceramic Review*, 1971, p.6.
27. Gwyn Hanssen, *Woodfire '86* proceedings, p. 31.

At first the work Hanssen Pigott made was inspired by the local traditional pottery and processes, with the naturally occurring iron pyrites of the unwashed clay showing though the ash glazes as dark speckles. Gradually however, she began to refine the glazes, using slips and slip glazes to achieve softer colours, and increasingly turned away from the very characteristics that had first attracted her to the pottery of the region. Initially she sieved the clay to remove the pyrites, and later bought ready prepared clay from a factory in St Amand-en-Puisaye. Hanssen Pigott also began making work from porcelain purchased from Vierzon, where it was prepared for use in the local industry. She used porcelain as the base for vitreous slips, a process from which her use of shino-type glazes evolved. More of her work was now glazed.[28]

All of the work Hanssen Pigott produced was intended for use and she particularly enjoyed making tableware with some uniquely French requirements, such as bowls for coffee and tea – instead of mugs and cups with handles – and dinner plates on which shallow soup plates were placed. She did not however make large volumes of any particular type of pot, and did not consider herself a repetition potter, unlike many of her contemporaries.

Hanssen Pigott's later years in France, from 1971 to 1973, were restless, and she travelled abroad to teach more frequently, to the USA and Holland, trying, as she later reflected: 'to get away from the centre of the little world I had made for myself. '[29] Her reasons for leaving her home and studio in France, as she described: 'taking only what I could carry in my bag'[30] are complex, and include a dissatisfaction with the work she was making, the life she was living, and the need to search for a focus beyond her work. In late 1972 she had heard about Maharaji or Prem Rawat, a teacher of a meditation practice that he called 'Knowledge'[31] and went to a meeting in Paris to learn more. This experience appears to have been the catalyst for a longed for change in direction in Hanssen Pigott's life. The house she left in Achères became an ashram for Prem Rawat's followers.

28. Eileen Lewenstein and Emmanuel Cooper, 'Gwyn Hanssen Talking', *Ceramic Review*, No. 11, 1971, p.6.
29. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott', *Pottery in Australia*, 1983, p.12.
30. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, 'Autobiographical Notes', 1991, p.49.
31. Based on the discovery of personal resources such as inner strength, choice, appreciation and hope. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prem_Rawat Accessed 15/06/2016

Some twenty-five years after she first moved to France Hanssen Pigott described the work that she had made at Achères as some of her best.[32] The British writer on crafts, Tanya Harrod referred to it as 'some of the most beautiful ceramics to come out of the studio pottery movement' (Figures 38 and 39, page 227).[33]

Having left France Hanssen Pigott stopped making pots and was not sure whether she would ever do so again. She described this stage in her life: 'I needed to stop, to dive into the experience of my own life, to test inside myself a new-found reality.'[34] She eventually decided to return to Australia, which coincided with a period of unprecedented development in the crafts, with grants available for a variety of purposes including establishing workshops, training young crafts people, and overseas travel to gain experience.[35]

In 1975 Hanssen Pigott established Linden Rise Pottery in Kingston, near Hobart in south east Tasmania, with the assistance of a grant from the Crafts Board of the Australia Council. This was to be the first of many grants she would receive for establishing workshops in different Australian states during the following thirty-eight years of her career. American potter John Pigott joined her in Tasmania, as trainee and assistant. They had met at East Sydney Technical College where she was teaching, and he was a student. They were married in 1976. They built a woodfire kiln and carried out geological explorations for suitable clays and materials and pigments for use in glazes. The kiln was very different from the large kiln Hanssen Pigott had built in France. It was 'roughly based on a plan by Fred Olsen, with a Dutch oven firebox, but with the addition of a small "secret chamber" before the main chamber'.[36] According to Hanssen Pigott the work that she and John Pigott produced at this time 'showed a definite traditional European peasant bias'.[37]

32. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, 'Autobiographical Notes', 1991, p.49.
33. Tanya Harrod, 'Portrait of an Artist as a Young Woman', 50-year survey exhibition catalogue, p.13.
34. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, artist's statement published in Bruce Anderson and John Hoare (editors), *Clay Statements: Australian Contemporary Ceramics,* 1985, p.34, quoted in 'Knowledge, Form, Usefulness and the Unknown: The Art of Gwyn Hanssen Pigott', Jason Smith, 50-year survey exhibition catalogue, p.25.
35. Grace Cochrane, *The Crafts Movement in Australia: a History*, New South Wales University Press, 1992, has a comprehensive history of this aspect of Australian crafts.
36. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, quoted in Minogue and Sanderson, 2000, p.15.
37. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott 'Autobiographical Notes', 1991, p.49.

When Hanssen Pigott's partnership with John Pigott came to an end in 1980, she moved back to the mainland, to Adelaide in South Australia, and became a tenant in the well-know ceramics studio The Jam Factory, where she remained for a year. As woodfiring was not an option Hanssen Pigott decided to 'concentrate on what the gas kiln available there did best: uniformly repeat tested qualities' and began producing porcelain tableware glazed in celadon or shino with some decoration.[38]

In 1981 Hanssen Pigott relocated studios again, this time moving to Brisbane in Queensland, having been invited to take over the production pottery at the Brisbane College of Advanced Education at Kelvin Grove. As resident potter Hanssen Pigott at first produced tableware which was gas-fired in a fibre kiln. A Bourry box woodfire kiln was later built. The wood-fired work was highly decorated with fine lines in blue pigment, inspired by Nigerian indigo dyed fabrics. Gold lustre was applied to some pieces, accentuating the repetitive linear patterns. An exhibition shown at Blackfriars Gallery in Sydney in April 1983 (the opening of which I attended and where I met Hanssen Pigott for the first time) included pieces with extremely intricate decoration, and was the most highly decorated work that Hanssen Pigott ever produced. All of the pots in the exhibition were intended for use – teapots, cups and saucers, jugs, lidded boxes, and bowls – with simple, refined forms and perfectly smooth surfaces, providing a suitable ground for the finely brushed decoration.

In a paper presented at the first national woodfire conference at Gippsland, Victoria, in 1986 Hanssen Pigott described her work from this time:

> I am using wood in two ways: the first to change the pinkness of a shino-type glaze towards amber, to work in conjunction with blue and gold decoration; and secondly to leach colour from the paler iron reds giving only a touch of warmth to an otherwise simple form. I feel especially now I am all the time teetering on the edge of either prettiness or vacuity, my dreaded antagonists. It is time perhaps to draw back to the severities of the gas fire. Wood, sometimes, is dangerous.[39]

The decoration eventually became so complex that in the end Hanssen Pigott felt that there was 'nowhere left to go', so she 'stopped cold'.[40]

38. Ibid., p.49.
39. Gwyn Hanssen, *Woodfire '86* proceedings, p.33.
40. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, 'Autobiographical Notes', 1991, p.49.

During her time at Kelvin Grove, Hanssen Pigott also worked as a part-time tutor with The Flying Arts School, visiting remote areas throughout Queensland and northern New South Wales for periods of one to two weeks, to conduct workshops for small groups with only rudimentary tools and materials. This experience provided an opportunity to meet and interact with other artists from different disciplines who were her fellow tutors. She also greatly enjoyed the flying involved.

Hanssen Pigott remained at Kelvin Grove for seven years before deciding that it was again time to move on. One reason for this decision was that after this long period working in a relatively public space, she now wanted an opportunity to work alone again in a studio of her own. Having grown familiar with the landscape from her travels with the Flying Art School, she decided to remain in Queensland, but to settle in a rural instead of an urban area.

It was during her residency at Kelvin Grove that developments occurred that saw a significant change in direction in Hanssen Pigott's work, and the beginning of the 'still life' arrangements. Several factors contributed to this change, which will be discussed below, but before doing so it is of relevance to consider the influences on Hanssen Pigott's work up to this point in her career.

## 5.2: The formative influences and historical precedents that contributed to the development of Gwyn Hanssen Pigott's work

### Chinese Sung Dynasty pottery

In the catalogue of Hanssen Pigott's fifty-year retrospective exhibition there are illustrations of some of the pieces from the Kent Collection at the National Gallery of Victoria where the exhibition was held, with which she had become familiar during her student days. Four Chinese Sung dynasty, and one Korean Koryo dynasty bowls (Figures 36 and 44, pages 223 and 233) are included. In the accompanying essay Mae Anna Pang (Senior Curator of Asian Art at the Gallery) explained that these pieces had 'a special place in the artist's heart'. These were the pots that had first attracted Hanssen Pigott's attention and which, as she later said, made her a potter.

Close examination of these pots reveals 'imperfections', most noticeably in the 'distortion' of one bowl (Figure 36, page 223), which has warped in firing, resulting in an elliptical rim.

This feature, together with unevenness in the glaze surface, contributes to the bowl's 'character', which would be lacking in a piece displaying cold symmetrical perfection. The lineage for the inspiration for Hanssen Pigott's bowls from the earliest days of her practice in London (Figure 35, page 223) to those in her later installations, is clearly evident in this unassuming piece.

Thus we see that even before her apprenticeship with McMeekin, Hanssen Pigott had been attracted to the refined pure forms of this work, and much of her training with him involved prospecting for indigenous materials that they used to make clay bodies and glazes in the spirit of Sung wares. As a twenty-first birthday gift her father 'with directions from Ivan' bought for her in London 'a little Song Dynasty saucer with two exquisitely carved fish under a Lung Chuan celadon'.[41]

In the Foreword to the proceedings of the third Australian woodfire conference held at Northern Rivers University, NSW in 1992, McMeekin commented on the then 'emphasis on Oriental ash effects like those of Bizen, Shigaraki, Iga and Tamba in Japan from 14th century – and in China at the time of Christ'. He added that had he been able to attend the conference he would 'probably have attempted to interest people in the woodfiring techniques used for those subtle, gentle, sensuous glaze effects of Sung China, and their adaption to modern times'.[42] In both the simple austere forms and the soft, quiet, monochromatic tones of the glazes, Hanssen Pigott's later work echoes these qualities of the Sung wares.

**McMeekin and Cardew**

It is probably true to say that McMeekin was not only the first major influence on Hanssen Pigott's perception of pottery, but an influence that remained with her in one respect or another throughout her career. She described the significance of this early training, which had laid the foundation, not only for the way in which she would continue to work, but also her attitude towards pottery and appreciation of it:

> Really, Ivan taught me how to read pots: with my eyes and hands. He taught how to know the qualities of clay bodies, the subtle differences of glaze surface and depth,

41. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, 'Autobiographical Notes', 1991, p.46.
42. Ivan McMeekin, *Woodfire '92 Conference Proceedings*, unpaginated.

> and about thoroughness and patience and the futility of short cuts. We threw the pots on kick wheels with thick tulip oak wheel heads. We raw-glazed them in a small, efficient, wood burning kiln (an adaptation of Cardew's translation of the firebox developed by Emile Bourry for the Sèvres porcelain manufacture).[43]
>
> Ivan painstakingly tested the local materials to refine the porcelain and stoneware bodies we used and to make the glazes I still wonder at – fresh now, glowing. We didn't have sophisticated machinery and spent a lot of time digging and crushing and blunging and ladling and sieving and wedging and kneading. I still can't bear to use anything but my hands to stir the glazes – feeling the consistency, losing my fingernails. And wood is the only real fuel![44]

There are several different layers of influence referenced here, at both technical and aesthetic levels, that continued to resonate with Hanssen Pigott and had an impact throughout the many different phases of her practice. Perhaps the most important is a way of looking at and really seeing pots, to consider every aspect thoroughly, including the materials from which they were made and how they were made.

From McMeekin Hanssen Pigott developed a lifelong interest in sourcing and using local raw materials, and inspired many of those with whom she came in contact through her teaching and conducting workshops to do the same. This was particularly the case when she lived in Tasmania, and together with her then husband John Pigott conducted extensive research on local indigenous materials in the composition of clay bodies and glazes. This approach to materials had a lasting influence on potters in Tasmania, including Ben Richardson, who was a student at the School of Art in Hobart when Hanssen Pigott taught there. Richardson made the point that it was during the years that she spent in Tasmania that Hanssen Pigott was nearest to the practice of McMeekin and Cardew, preparing her own clay and researching geology. In Richardson's view the work she produced at this time was truer to their teachings.[45]

Cardew's main influence on Hanssen Pigott was probably a reinforcement of the principles that she had learned from McMeekin, stressing the importance of the materials and processes used in determining the quality of pots.

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43. This is not in fact correct. The design, as it was used in the French porcelain industry was documented by Bourry, but was neither designed nor developed by him. It had been in use long before the date of the publication of his book *A Treatise on Ceramics Industries in* which it was documented. The book was first published in French in 1897, with the first English translation in 1901.
44. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, 'Autobiographical Notes', 1991, p.46.
45. Conversation with Ben Richardson, Ridgeline Pottery, Tasmania, 17th Sept. 2015.

**Leach**

While McMeekin thought highly of Leach's work and philosophy, he remained true to the work that had first awakened his interest in and love of pottery – classical Chinese wares, at a time when, in response to Leach's writing, potters around the world were turning to Japanese ceramics and processes for inspiration. Hanssen Pigott, first exposed to Japanese influences at the Leach Pottery, did not follow this route, but instead was pleased to discover a European tradition and found inspiration in the French pottery from the La Borne area.

Hanssen Pigott was critical of some of the practices at the Leach Pottery. She did not agree with potters making a distinction between production ware (standard ware, or what has been referred to as the 'bread and butter' range[46]) and special one-off (individual, exhibition) pieces, as Leach did. She explained her feelings about this subject early in her career:

> For me there is no division between repeated wares and individual wares. If I happen to want just to make one or two, or a lot, I make them all with the same concern! I think the concept of bread and butter lines as opposed to individual pieces very dangerous. It is the term 'bread and butter' that is dubious. The concept 'I am doing this because it gives me the money to do that'. Making pots is such a whole thing and your life is so whole you can't make these distinctions without something being lost.[47]

It was McMeekin's belief that one should put as much into the making an eggcup as any other type of pot. Hanssen Pigott shared this belief and practiced it throughout her career.[48]

Concerning the technique of throwing, McMeekin considered that with practice it should only be necessary to weigh clay to equal weights, and similar forms would be achieved naturally from the process of repetition throwing. At the Leach Pottery in producing the 'standard ware', throwing gauges were used to achieve repeat heights and widths, which encouraged the thrower to stretch the clay, perhaps more than it would if a more spontaneous and natural method of throwing were to be practiced.

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46. For a description of the distinction that Leach made between the ranges of work produced at the Leach Pottery, see quote in Chapter 3, and note 46, on page 132.
47. 'Gwyn Hanssen Talking', *Ceramic Review*, 1971, p.5.
48. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, interview recorded with Tanya Harrod on 15th Jan. 2005, in Aberystwyth University Ceramics Archive.

The main impact on Hanssen Pigott's future career resulting from her time at the Leach pottery appears to have been exposure to Leach's study collection, experiencing the operation of a workshop at first hand, becoming familiar with the design of the climbing kiln, and the friendships that developed with some of her fellow trainees.

**Traditional French Pottery and the *Mingei* philosophy**

When Hanssen Pigott established her studio in France in 1965 and built a large woodfire kiln, from comments she later made she would appear to have been attempting to live and work in accordance with the principles of *Mingei* philosophy. Considering this period of her career, some ten years after she had left France, she recalled:

> I tried, by my lifestyle, absorbing the traditions around me, to make something which would be 'real'. I hoped that if I lived like a traditional potter somehow I would make pots like those unpretentious craftsmen in times gone by. But in fact I wasn't unpretentious at all – nor simple. And sometimes I could see that in fact I was living a contradiction – I was acting a part that I hadn't the strength for, and I was caught in a very subtle ambition to which I saw no end.[49]

Discussing her then current work in 1997, Hanssen Pigott stated that it was not what she thought it would ever be about when she 'tried to live like the unknown craftsman in a hamlet in France'.[50] Attracted by the *Mingei* philosophy, and having attempted to live and work according to its principles, Hanssen Pigott found that they were not either appropriate for, or practicable by potters in the West in the twentieth century.

In his book on the life and work of another Australian artist who spent a significant part of her career living in France and working as a potter – Bruce Adams wrote of Anne Dangar's work in the context of the traditional French potteries where she had learnt the craft:

> Dangar was a modern studio ceramist working in a traditional artisanal setting, fusing elements of her artistic repertoire onto a vernacular idiom to arrive at a localised, appropriative cultural practice [...] As a potter Dangar was engaged in a kind of double act: though she identified herself as a country artisan producing functional ware for villagers, she never lost the self-conscious, self-critical manner of an urban artist, someone with a sophisticated sensibility, aware of her historical position.[51]

49. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, *Pottery in Australia*, 1983, p.12.
50. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, 'Pulled-Back Simplicity', *Studio Potter*, Vol. 26, Number 1, Dec. 1997, p.7.
51. Adams, 2004, p.85.

A disciple of the cubist painter Albert Gleizes (1881–1953), Dangar spent over twenty years at the artists' commune at Moly-Sabata that he founded in the Rhône Valley. By the time that Hanssen Pigott had arrived in the La Borne area she had completed a Degree course in Art History at university, and had been exposed to many influences during her training in pottery in Australia, and on an international level as a professional potter in Britain. She could never, therefore, have worked in an unselfconscious manner as advocated by Yanagi and his colleagues, producing work possessing the same spirit and characteristics as the traditional wares of the region, despite the romanticism inherent in such ideology.

**Truth to materials**

In his review of Hanssen Pigott's 2005 retrospective exhibition, Owen Rye, who had studied with McMeekin when he was teaching at the University of New South Wales in Sydney, wrote that: 'McMeekin's appreciation of materials and skills in using them gave those who worked with him a life-long appreciation and understanding of the basis of ceramic beauty in materials and firing. He did not just look at pots; he studied their most intimate details.'[52] Hanssen Pigott's three-year apprenticeship with McMeekin gave her a fundamental grounding in clays and glaze materials. In a tribute to McMeekin after his death in 1993, she recalled that:

> We didn't have sophisticated machinery. […] But those days of pounding rocks, and the weeks of getting samples from a hand driven post-hole digger, testing every six inches of depth, closely noting all the differences, were to result in a wealth of shared knowledge and beautiful pots.[53]

There is a letter from Cardew in the Gwyn Hanssen Pigott archive of the National Gallery of Australia, dated 8th June 1981, concerning the 'little porcelain *Bijoutier*' given to the Cardews by Hanssen Pigott. The letter also refers to a tea set shown in an exhibition at the Round Room in International House (London). Cardew stated that these pots:

> Point (in my view) in the direction, or certainly one direction in which potters ought to be moving in this Age. Kindness in the material, and loving care in the treatment of it: I wish there was more of that to be seen in modern English craft pottery – or anywhere![54]

52. Owen Rye, 'Gwyn Hanssen Pigott A Fifty Year Survey', *Ceramics Art and Perception*, No. 62, 2005, p.5.
53. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, 'Ivan McMeekin, 1919–1993', *Ceramics Art and Perception*, No. 13, 1993, p.94.
54. GHP Archive / NGA, accessed Sept. 2015.

At that time Hanssen Pigott was working at Kelvin Grove in Queensland, and included in the range of pots she was then producing were small thrown porcelain jewellery boxes with decorated lids. It may have been to one of these that Cardew referred. His comment on Hanssen Pigott's use and handling of materials is descriptive of her response to the materials she used throughout her career, whether working in stoneware or porcelain, and firing with wood or gas.

**Rie and Coper**

In his essay in the catalogue of the exhibition *Gwyn Hanssen Pigott A Twenty Year Survey*, shown at Queensland Art Gallery in Brisbane in 1996, Glenn R. Cooke (Curator of Decorative Arts at the Gallery) made the point that, although she had started her pottery training in Australia, Hanssen Pigott's 'development was largely based in Europe'. This was a reference not only to the potters that she had worked with in England, and the periods spent in her own studios in London and France, but also the influence of the European potters with whom she came into contact, notably Lucie Rie and Hans Coper.

When living in London in 1961, Hanssen Pigott attended classes given by Rie (who lived nearby at Marble Arch), at Camberwell School of Art, and often visited her home and studio. The work of both Rie and Coper and their modernist approach was in sharp contrast to Leach's Anglo-Oriental philosophy, and Finch and Cardew's work inspired by traditional English pottery. Hanssen Pigott later wrote of her early response to Rie's work:

> It did take time for me to see some pots. Her gravely poised bottles with those heart-rending flaring necks eluded me for years. But some of the milkily pitted, slightly oval, white bowls seemed as miraculous as the sixteenth-century Korean penny rice bowl Bernard Leach used as a touchstone or the fragile Korean bowl I had first seen in the Kent Collection.[55]

In a 2011 interview, Hanssen Pigott referred to the importance of the influence of Coper, particularly the impact of his 1965 solo exhibition in London:

55. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, Autobiographical Notes', 1991, p.48.

> It was the first time, when I walked into an exhibition, that I was confronted by the spaces between the pots, which seemed to still the air between them. It was very quiet. That was inspiring. It was the stillness that impressed me.[56]

Exposure to the work of Rie and Coper, of which Oliver Watson stated 'nothing is overdone, but everything is deeply considered',[57] made Hanssen Pigott aware of an aspect of making that she had not previously considered. Up to that time she had primarily been familiar with work fired in reduction in woodfire and oil fire kilns, and she had considered that work fired in the oxidising atmosphere of electric kilns could not be very interesting. Seeing pots by Rie and Coper fired in electric kilns, made her realise that their work had to have (and indeed had) something extra, and was not reliant on the qualities achievable in specific types of firings that enrich clay and glaze surfaces. This made her consider her own work in a new light.

### 5.3: The evolution of Gwyn Hanssen Pigott's work from the late 1980s

On more than one occasion throughout her career Hanssen Pigott seems to have arrived at a point when she felt that she had reached the limit of the potential for development in her then current range of work, and consequently became dissatisfied. Reaching this stage was a catalyst, not only for a change in her work, but also rather dramatically in her life, which in each instance also included a geographic change, either of country, or Australian state. One of the factors that may have contributed to these many changes in style of work and location, was her technical mastery in ceramics. Whenever she found herself becoming in any way complacent, the solution she saw was a total change, and the challenges that she would have to face, working with new materials for her clays and glazes and building a new kiln.

The change in direction that occurred in Hanssen Pigott's work in the late 1980s has been viewed as a radical departure, not only in her own work, but also within the field of contemporary ceramics. On delving deeper into the chronology of the evolution of her work up to that point, the new phase – if not quite expected, certainly appears to have occurred more incrementally. Events and circumstances that may have contributed to this new direction have been advanced by Hanssen Pigott herself and written about by a range

56. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott interviewed by *Craft Australia* magazine in June 2011. Online archive accessed on 12/08/2016. www.craftaustralia.org.au
57. Oliver Watson, *Studio Pottery*, 1990, p.29.

of commentators. The sequence of events has been documented differently in various sources, and consequently it is difficult to catalogue them accurately chronologically. The evolution of the new work involved many different stages and developments, some of which are discussed here.

**1.** While Hanssen Pigott was at Kevin Grove, the emphasis in the international woodfire community was becoming focussed on oriental style firings in kilns designed for long-duration firing, with resulting heavily ash-coated surfaces, bearing evidence of the intensity of the process. Hanssen Pigott was following a very different path in terms of woodfiring, seeking a much quieter result, and her practice does not appear to have been impacted upon by this movement in ceramics. She had been introduced to a Japanese aesthetic in woodfiring at the Leach Pottery thirty years previously, by Leach's (third) wife American potter Janet Leach. Janet had recently returned from working in Japan, and Hamada Atsuyo, Hamada Shoji's son, was working at the pottery at that time. Hanssen Pigott explained that she and some of the other apprentices had 'mock-Bizen firings in Janet's newly built oil-fired kiln', inspired by Janet's pots and slides from Tamba, and Atsuyo's slides of Japanese kiln building. She was, she said:

> Moved and confronted by this new (to me) aesthetic of the accidental: pots subjected to the fire for days and burnt to rock. I could see that understatement and austerity were necessary to temper the inherent flamboyance of the methods. The contradiction pleased me. I was delighted by the easy asymmetry of some of the wares but uneasy with any extravagant deformation. Was this self-conscious manipulation?[58]

The kiln that Hanssen Pigott had built with John Pigott in Tasmania was based on an Olsen fastfire type (a design intended for relatively short firing cycles, in which the accumulation of flyash is not a main priority) had incorporated a chamber in which they produced unglazed Bizen style wares. These pots however mainly consisted of French-style storage jars, teapots, and covered boxes. So while there was an area in the kiln in which it was possible to achieve 'Bizen' type effects, during this period Hanssen Pigott used it for firing work inspired by a European rather than an Oriental tradition.

58. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, 'Autobiographical Notes', 1991, p.48.

Having met the potter Heja Chong at the 1986 Woodfire Conference in Gippsland, they became friends, and Hanssen Pigott was subsequently invited to fire some of her work in Chong's Bizen type kiln in Victoria (in 1988). Born in Japan to Korean parents, Chong had travelled from her home in Australia to study the Bizen tradition, working with Fujiwara Yu in Imbe, one of the famous traditional pottery areas of Japan. Her kiln had been built in 1983 at the Dunmoochin Artists Co-operative at Cottles Bridge, 50 kilometres north east of Melbourne, Victoria, which had been established by the painter Clifton Pugh in the early 1950s. The effects that it is possible to achieve in such a large multi-chambered kiln (noborigama), fired for up to ten days, are vastly different from those achievable in Bourry-box type kilns. Effects achievable in different chambers can range from heavily ashed surfaces in the front section, combined chamber/firebox, to quieter effects with rich flashes of colour in subsequent chambers.

For firing in Chong's kiln Hanssen Pigott decided to approach the making in a different way – no doubt conscious of the range of possible fired effects achievable – and chose to make something new, making bottles for the first time, as she explained:

> Needing pots which would invite the fire, but feeling uneasy with the traditional Japanese style that had grown around the long noborigama firings. So rooted more in Europe than in east Asia I looked to the glass forms that I knew. I looked, too, at the drawings by Giorgio Morandi, books of this favourite being to hand.
>
> The first bottles were made in two parts, with attempts at looseness. But the fire marks proved far too complex for the divided shapes, and gradually the bottles became seamless, less defined, like sketches.[59]

On a visit to Paris in 1971, whilst living in France, Hanssen Pigott had seen the Giorgio Morandi retrospective exhibition at the Musée National d'Art Moderne. Seeing the work of this Italian painter, who spent a large part of his career creating still lifes, the subjects of which were a limited range of everyday household objects, had a profound effect on her. Hanssen Pigott used the term 'still life' for the first time for work from the collaborative process with Chong – a group consisting of two 'Bizen fired' bottles and a bowl – when it was exhibited publicly. This arrangement is now in the collection of the city of Ballarat Art Gallery (Figure 40, page 229).

59. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, quoted in Minogue and Sanderson, 2000, p.17.

It is significant that the experience that was the catalyst for a new beginning in Hanssen Pigott's practice, which led to the quiet, austere glazed work for which she subsequently became most well known, was producing pieces with unglazed Bizen type effects. Hanssen Pigott explained that from these firings the few finished bottles that pleased her 'were kept in small groups – almost huddles'. The pieces were precious to her not only because those that satisfied her were few in number, but as Chong's studio and kiln were situated over 1800 kilometres from Hanssen Pigott's, regular visits were not a practical option. The chamber where the least amount of ash was deposited on the work became her favourite place in Chong's kiln for firing her pots. This then is one of the explanations that Hanssen Pigott gave for the genesis of her still-life arrangements.

Considering Morandi again inspired the arrangement of her work in still life formations, but it was, as she has explained, the fact that she had to consider in detail what it was that she 'liked about those radically simplified shapes, standing with each other, that started a whole new train of looking'.[60] Rather than seeing the forms individually, the new way of 'looking' led to their placement in relation to each other, and consideration of the spaces in between.

**2.** Hanssen Pigott had visited London in 1984 for a solo exhibition at the Casson Gallery. This was her first visit to the UK since she had returned to live in Australia in 1973, and she described how she 'was confronted by the enormous changes that had taken place' in the intervening decade. The potters whose work she saw and whose studios she visited included Elizabeth Fritch, Richard Batterham, Janice Tchalenko, Lucie Rie, Alison Britton, Andrew and Joanna Young, Sandy Brown, Svend Bayer, Clive Bowen, Seth Cardew, Janet Leach, Wally Keeler, Sarah Walton and many others.[61]

These encounters with people and pots had a significant impact on Hanssen Pigott's attitude to her work and led to a reassessment of it. Seeing examples of Hanssen Pigott's pots, Rie had commented that 'They don't look very loved'.[62] Hanssen Pigott considered that most of her work seemed 'shallow of content' and took the opportunity whilst in London to see again paintings by Piero della Francesca at the National Gallery and Morandi at the Tate. Her response to this work was that, 'Yes, there was something deeply human

60. Ibid, p.18.
61. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, 'Autobiographical Notes', 1991, p.50.
62. Quoted in Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, 'Autobiographical Notes', 1991, p.50.

and consoling to feel and express. But the work had to be stripped of anything not essential.'[63]

**3.** In 1987 Hanssen Pigott was one of the makers invited to take part in *The Maker's Choice* exhibition, organised by the Crafts Council of South Australia. Each participant was asked to select three other artists/makers whose work would then be exhibited alongside their own. She chose Giorgio Morandi, Lucie Rie and Hans Coper, with what she described as 'a fair amount of nerve'.[64] Preparing for this exhibition had an impact on the work that Hanssen Pigott produced, as she explained in the artist statement published in the exhibition catalogue: 'It has initiated an uncomfortable but cathartic reassessment of my present stand and a reaffirmation of a purpose only tenuously held in the past few years.'[65] One of the more visible changes in her work was making bowls which did not have turned foot rings – a process that she had carried out during much of her practice as a potter. She also began to pare down and simplify forms even more.[66]

**4.** During the latter part of her residency at Kelvin Grove, Hanssen Pigott began to realise that changes were occurring concerning the place of pottery in the educational system at the College, with distinctions being made between work perceived as production pottery, and pottery which was conceptual and sculptural. The explanation given in the 50-year survey exhibition catalogue by curator Jason Smith was that:

> Hanssen Pigott saw that in the proliferation of disparate ceramic styles in the 1980s, fuelled by an international postmodernism and pluralist tendencies that had origins in the 1970s, much of her work from that period was ignored in critical discourse.[67]

This realisation was another of the contributory factors that led Hanssen Pigott to completely rethink both the status and direction of her work. It also contributed to her decision that it was time to leave Kelvin Grove.

63. Ibid, p.50.
64. Ibid, p.50.
65. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, artist's statement in *The Makers' Choice* exhibition catalogue, Crafts Council of South Australia, 1987.
66. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, 'Autobiographical Notes', 1991, p.50
67. Jason Smith 'Knowledge, Form, Usefulness and the Unknown: The Art of Gwyn Hanssen Pigott' in 50-year survey exhibition catalogue, p. 30.

**5.** In 1987 Hanssen Pigott met Garry Anderson, the owner of a fine art gallery in Sydney. She first exhibited at Anderson's gallery in that year and again two years later, when the work shown included still life arrangements. Anderson, who appreciated her work as abstract art, encouraged the new work and displayed it in the manner in which Hanssen Pigott wanted it to be seen – with 'air around it'.[68] Through Anderson she met other artists who exhibited at his gallery and who 'inspired and supported her vision'.[69] Her exhibitions at the Garry Anderson Gallery were received very positively, a fact that gave Hanssen Pigott a sense of confidence in making a decision to take a new direction in her work, and to establish a studio of her own.

**6.** Another of the explanations Hanssen Pigott gave for beginning her still lifes, was a desire for the pots to be studied/considered in greater detail – to retain the viewer's attention: 'I might say I started the groupings because I wanted the pots to be looked at. Considered. The title, *Three Inseparable Bowls*, given to related but different bowls, might raise a question, lengthen a glance.'[70] She had shown the first arrangement of what she referred to as 'Three Inseparable Bowls' as early as 1987 at the Garry Anderson Gallery. (However these groupings were not yet referred to as still lives.) It was a title that she used on a number of occasions thereafter. Three such arrangements, all with the same title are illustrated on a page of the 2005 retrospective exhibition catalogue (page 29) dating from 1988 and 1989.

**7.** While Hanssen Pigott has pointed to these experiences as the start of the still lifes, Mark Del Vecchio related an account that having her pots 'shown individually in exhibitions, these beautiful vessels were ignored, seemingly [because they were considered as being] too traditional. In one exhibition she spontaneously decided to exhibit the work in a carefully composed grouping and quite suddenly it was noticed'.[71]

Del Vecchio continued that it was at this point, having already begun to exhibit her work in groups and 'realising that she was invading the still-life tradition', that Hanssen Pigott 'began to delve into painters who specialised in this work and in the process fell in love with the work of Giorgio Morandi'. Yet from Hanssen Pigott's own account it would appear

68. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, 'Autobiographical Notes', 1991, p.50.
69. Ibid., p.50.
70. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, 'Notes from Netherdale', *Ceramics Art and Perception*, No. 27, 1997, p.80.
71. Mark Del Vecchio, *Postmodern Ceramics*, Thames & Hudson, 2001, p.72.

that she had already been familiar with, and inspired by, Morandi's work long before she began creating assemblages of her own work.

The first pots by Hanssen Pigott that were fired in Chong's kiln could almost be described as 'chunky', a term that could never have been applied to any of her previous work. By the time that she produced pieces for a subsequent firing in Chong's kiln the bottle forms had been refined. No longer 'mallet' shaped and made in two parts, they were now more streamline, in Hanssen Pigott's own words – seamless, less defined, like sketches – and mark an intermediate stage in the development of the bottle shapes that would continue to feature prominently in her still lifes. This progression is clearly visible in the bottle forms in Figures 40, 41, 42, 43 and 49 (on pages 229, 231 and 237).

In 1989 Hanssen Pigott left Kelvin Grove and established a studio in a rural area at Netherdale, 70 kilometres west of Mackay in central Queensland. Here she built another Bourry-box kiln. She had made gradual modifications to the designs of the kilns that she had built over the years, and by this stage the design had been honed to the extent that it perfectly suited her needs. One of the features that she incorporated was a 'wicket' (or door) at both the front and back of the ware chamber. This meant that in packing the kiln she only had to lean in halfway to place the kiln shelves and pots, which was, as she said 'an important consideration for an aging back'.[72] This feature would also be incorporated in Hanssen Pigott's last kiln built at Ipswich (Figure 50 on page 237).

In considering the work made during Hanssen Pigott's early years at Netherdale from 1989 to the early 1990s, there is an easily observable progression, both in terms of the forms themselves and also the surfaces. The beginning of the processes of refining and paring back is evident. The forms became simplified, more refined, resolved, the surfaces smoother and the glaze tones consist mostly of muted pastel shades. The variation in tone between different glazes appeared incremental in terms of tonal gradation and any effect of flyash on the glaze is hardly perceptible. The forms evolved from those first fired in Chong's kiln with their unglazed, heavily ashed surfaces, to smooth, glazed, austere porcelain, reminiscent of industrially produced, mould-made shapes (Figure 43, page 231). Framed in a strong yellow colour a memorable image of this assemblage appeared on the front cover

72. Minogue and Sanderson, 2000, p.15.

of the February 1990 issue of *Pottery in Australia,* and was probably the first widely circulated image showing Hanssen Pigott's new method of displaying her work in groups.

Netherdale was the studio that Hanssen Pigott had spent most time in up to that point, but after eleven years she relocated once again, this time to a suburb of Ipswich, a city 40km south-west of Brisbane. Although a woodfire kiln was built at the new studio in 2004, for various reasons, including a busy exhibition schedule, it still had not been fired by 2006, as Hanssen Pigott explained in a letter to me dated 31st May that year.[73] The assemblages created during this time when Hanssen Pigott was without a woodfire kiln (2000–2006), consisting of gas-fired porcelain elements with the emphasis on translucency have a very different presence. Two photographs of an arrangement – *Yellow still life 2003* – made during this period and illustrated in the 2005 retrospective exhibition catalogue graphically illustrate the dramatic impact that light can have on this work, completely transforming colours and mood.

*Caravan* (Figure 47, page 235), an installation at the Tate St Ives in 2004, which was Hanssen Pigott's first showing of her new work in a non-commercial art space in Britain, was composed of groups of pots – beakers, bottles, bowls, jugs and cups – arranged to form a 16.76m (55 ft.) long parade, displayed in a curved glass fronted case. On a scale larger than any of her previous works, this was a temporary installation, with the elements from which it was composed drawn from collections worldwide. In *Fade with Four Bowls (Yellow, Sand, Cream, White)*, from 2007 (Figure 48, page 235) any woodfire effects are barely discernable, until individual pieces are closely examined and subtle variations in glaze tone become observable.

The level at which her installations were positioned in relation to the viewer was of prime importance to Hanssen Pigott. She wrote of this aspect of her work in her 1997 article in the *Studio Potter*:

> When I speak about form I am, of course, speaking about volume and line; and I love the way these interact and change with every angle of vision. So that from eye level a group of pots (a still life, or parade, or procession, or family, or tribe) might be at one glance severe and classical, with solid profiles and slightly pompous stances. And then, with a slight raising of one's height, the lips of bowls and jugs can appear to

73. Letter from Gwyn Hanssen Pigott to the author, dated 31st May, 2006.

> outline floating ovals of suspended colour; the pots no longer anthropomorphic but linear, seamless, like drawings.[74]

Each arrangement was accompanied by careful documentation, including instructions for placement and photographs showing the correct position of individual components, whether intended for installation in a gallery or in the home of a private collector. Hanssen Pigott was personally involved in the installation of major assemblages in museums and galleries, and did much international travelling for this purpose.

Hanssen Pigott's attention to detail in glazing her work reached a new level in the individual vessels from which the still lifes were composed. Aarti Vir, a potter from India who spent a month assisting Hanssen Pigott as she prepared for the second firing of her new woodfire kiln in Ipswich in 2008, described the painstaking processes involved:

> The complexity of that entire process was quite an eye opener. […] A different glaze for the inside of each pot, a different one for the outside. The extreme fragility of the bisqued pots made of the translucent porcelain body, making the glazing process even more exacting and intense. After the poured inside glaze was dry, the bowls were pushed down into the outside glaze up to the oval edge, held by the outward pressure of two fingers of each hand just inside the rim. Pulling them out against the suction of the liquid, and setting them down to dry was a precarious operation.
>
> Then fettling the glaze on each pot, making sure the glaze was even. Every pot with a little note to tell which glaze was on the inside, and which one was on the outside, so that if a pot was accidently knocked against another while packing the kiln, it could be touched up [before firing].[75]

### 5.4: The reception of Gwyn Hanssen Pigott's new work

Hanssen Pigott's work was perceived in a new way from the point when she began exhibition her assemblages in fine art galleries, as opposed to selling her pots through craft galleries and shops. It brought the work to the attention of an entirely different audience, including writers and critics. In the new narrative that resulted, the emphasis changed from discussion of individual pots as functional objects, to viewing groupings of them as sculptural presences. Unassuming pots – no longer intended for use – became objects of

74. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, 'Pulled-Back Simplicity', *Studio Potter*, 1997, p.5.
75. Aarti Vir, 'Complex Simplicity', *The Log Book*, issue 36, 2008, p.5.

contemplation, and analysis by a wide range of commentators, including, for example, the poet R.F. Brissenden,[76] and established Hanssen Pigott's international reputation as an artist.

Ten years after the first assemblages were created Hanssen Pigott wrote:

> To my delight, the pared down forms remained pots. Not metaphors, or suggestions: but pots, glazed, strong, usable. What is more, this eccentric presentation, unframed, unboxed, completely floating on an idea was accepted. I saw it as *something* and trusted its lead.[77]

Many of Hanssen Pigott's contemporaries did not know how to react to her new method of showing her work. In her essay in the 2005 retrospective exhibition catalogue, Alison Britton commented on the response to Hanssen Pigott's work shown in an exhibition *Still Lives*, at Galerie Besson in London in 1992 that 'a British audience saw the startling, though intrinsically logical transition'. Britton went on to explain that over a decade earlier in her curatorial essay for the catalogue of the exhibition *The Makers Eye* (Crafts Council, England, 1981), discussing her selection of work, objects that she 'saw as existing on a continuum from ordinary to magical somewhere on the line from design through craft to art', she had written:

> The objects in the middle, my main concern, are about life and still life at once. They can be used but their function is partly frozen in reflection about themselves […]. Objects such as these fill the gap between prose and poetry, between ordinary and breathtaking, combining both.[78]

It was as though Britton anticipated the work that Hanssen Pigott would begin to produce later in the decade. With a foundation in pottery which was very much based on the ideology of making work intended for use, and having spent much of her career, from 1955 to 1988, producing functional pots, there were huge implications in the change that Hanssen Pigott's work now underwent – as Britton put it 'from production to composition – from use to beauty'.[79]

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76. R.F. Brissenden, opening remarks at an exhibition of work by Hanssen Pigott at Narek Gallery, Cuppacumbalong, ACT, 2nd Sept. 1990, quoted by Jason Smith in 50-year survey exhibition catalogue, p.33.
77. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, 'Notes from Netherdale', *Ceramics Art and Perception*, 1997, p.80.
78. Quoted by Alison Britton in her essay, 'Gwyn Hanssen Pigott: A View from her Second Home', 50-year survey exhibition catalogue, p.66.
79. Ibid., p.65.

Hanssen Pigott offered this insight to her feelings about and attitude towards the new development in her work:

> But, strange, I no longer care if the cup, with its careful handle and balanced weight (the heritage of years of tea set making) stands unused, among a quiet group of table-top objects arranged as a still life, somewhere higher than table height. It is still a cup – an everyday object as ordinary and simple as can be; but from somewhere (because of its tense or tenuous relationship with other simple, recognized, even banal objects) pleasure comes.
>
> I am surprised. It's a weird idea. It is alarmingly contradictory, to make pots that are sweet to use and then to place them almost out of reach, to make beakers that are totally inviting and then to freeze them in an installation. Worse still, to take so much time with each piece, carefully trimming and turning and removing most marks of the throwing, to glaze with exacting precision, waxing inside even the simplest, smallest beaker to ensure a sharp, drawn edge. There has been an alarming turnaround. Old friends may indeed be worried.[80]

While Hanssen Pigott may not have been the first to create vessels in still life arrangements or assemblages, she was the first to do so with pots which were so clearly functional – that had been created with function so obviously in mind. Her background and all of the work produced up to this time had made those who bought her pots and fellow potters alike, expect her work to be used. She always considered and described herself as a potter, and never assumed the title of artist, a point that was discussed with her and which she confirmed in the last interview that she gave just days before her death.[81] Arranging the work in this manner – out of reach of the purpose for which it was so evidently intended, was the cause of some bewilderment.

One of those puzzled by the new work was potter Warren MacKenzie. Having received a gift of some recent pieces from Hanssen Pigott in 1990, he wrote to her:

> The pots are interesting but you have me completely puzzled as to what you are thinking. I remember (and have) pots of yours that were crisp and brilliant with an inner tension. They sat quietly but spoke strongly of conviction and even a passion which was exciting. These newest pieces are soft and rounded and it is hard to tell they were made by hand. I know you are looking for something in your work but I

80. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, 'Pulled-Back Simplicity', *Studio Potter*, 1997, p.7.
81. BL/CL Gwyn Hanssen Pigott.

> cannot relate to what it is. The change is too great for me to make the jump although it probably happened gradually and you see it as very logical.[82]

This reaction by MacKenzie is probably typical of what many people who were familiar with Hanssen Pigott's work felt on first seeing the 'still life' arrangements. However, as her work developed in this direction, not only was it accepted, but it inspired many others to create installations in a similar style, as will be seen.

### 5.5: How Gwyn Hanssen Pigott's work exemplifies 'The Quiet Touch of the Flame' – a subtle woodfire aesthetic

> This is what I love. I want it to be quiet, this touch of the wood. Hardly noticed, but essential. A fine dust of ash is brought in with the chimney's pull, and the pot which was almost nothing, almost inert, starts to breathe. Or so it seems. I know this is perverse. It's a great deal of work for a quiet effect; sometimes only a sense of a more lustrous bloom on the surface of a glaze – but once seen it's hard to give up that chance of a certain sort of beauty.[83]

These are the terms Hanssen Pigott used to describe the part played by the process of woodfiring in her work. The Bourry-box type of kiln that she used and adapted during the different stages of her career was particularly appropriate for achieving the effects that she sought, a very fine dusting of ash. Concerning this aspect of the kiln design she explained that:

> The pre-heated secondary air, first used by Michael O'Brien [who took over from Cardew] in Abuja, then used by Ivan McMeekin, and by John Pigott and myself in Australia, was extremely useful in avoiding any disturbance of the coarser ash (with certain woods), allowing only the finest ash to be carried in onto the glazed wares.[84]

Heavier coatings of ash would have resulted in a thicker layer of natural ash glaze on the already glazed surfaces, which was not an effect that Hanssen Pigott was seeking, and would not be appropriate for her precise and austere forms. In the catalogue to her 2006 exhibition at the Rex Irwin Gallery in Sydney, in which work from the first firing of her new woodfire kiln in Ipswich was shown, Hanssen Pigott stated:

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82. Letter from Warren MacKenzie to Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, dated 19th July 1990, GHP Archive / NGA.
83. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott quoted in Minogue and Sanderson, 2000, p.17.
84. Ibid., p.13.

> Firing with wood is altogether different. Uncertain, physical. The fuel is unpredictable, almost alive. Draughts and weather play their part, and the fine ash which falls on the unprotected pieces modifies the glazes – sometimes dramatically, and sometimes slightly – adding a bloom, or a softness, or a satin sheen, or sometimes a modulated crazing, to the surface: hardly noticeable at times, but tangible none-the-less.[85]

In Hanssen Pigott's earlier still lifes the ash from firing is evident on the surfaces of the work (for example Figure 42 from 1991, on page 231). Later, as the forms became ever more refined and pared back the effects from woodfiring became increasingly subtle. *Exodus II* from 1996 (Figure 46, page 235), can be considered an intermediate stage, leading to the later work where the qualities imparted on the glazed surfaces by the fly ash are subtle to the extent that the effect is, in Hanssen Pigott's words: 'hardly noticed, but essential'.[86] The pots in *Still Life with Beaker* (Figure 49 from 2007, page 237) are an example of this. They were fired in Hanssen Pigott's last kiln in Ipswich which had been a subject of discussion between us for some time. She wrote to me after the second firing that it was, 'hard to tell the works are wood-fired – the kiln turned out to be so efficient there was not so much fly ash, but enough to make the porcelain much "softer" in feeling, and gentler, on the whole.'[87]

When viewed in the context of an assemblage, woodfiring contributed variations across a range of glazed surfaces, which become obvious when compared to those which were not wood-fired, and where the surface glazes are more uniform on individual vessels. In arrangements where both wood-fired and non wood-fired pieces are combined, the difference between the two types of work is emphasised, and the subtle contrast contributes to the success of the overall assemblage.

When it came to arranging the still fife formations and deciding on the placement of individual pots in groups Hanssen Pigott explained:

> The amount of ash, the richness of the lustrous colours, the cloudiness of a pale bottle, plays a vital part. Groups can easily become too lush, if there is too much evidence of the fire. Less is definitely more, for a communal harmony.[88]

85. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, artist's statement in catalogue of exhibition shown at the Rex Irwin Gallery in Sydney, October 24th–November 18th 2006, unpaginated.
86. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, quoted in Minogue and Sanderson, 2000, p.17.
87. E-mail from Gwyn Hanssen Pigott to the author, 15th October 2007.
88. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, quoted in Minogue and Sanderson, 2000, p.18.

Overall the impact that resulted from woodfiring was the addition of a warmth and softness to the tones of glazes, which might otherwise appear hard and cold when pieces were shown en masse. This was in essence the quality that Hanssen Pigott sought from woodfiring, an effect so subtle that it was hardly discernable, but contributing a characteristic that would be missed by those who observed closely, and that could not be achieved in any other way.

In addition to contributing variation of tone to the glazed surfaces of Hanssen Pigott's work, the process of woodfiring also had an impact on individual pieces, in that some forms – particularly bowls – became slightly distorted during firing, resulting in soft oval shapes. This was an aspect of the process that appealed to Hanssen Pigott, and she exaggerated the effect by deliberately forming pieces into oval shapes, having dampened them again after the final turning, causing the rims to tilt slightly.[89]

### 5.6: The capacity Gwyn Hanssen Pigott's work to evoke a sense of quietness

Victor Margrie, who co-founded the studio pottery course at Harrow School of Art with potter Mick Casson in 1963, in his essay for the catalogue of Hanssen Pigott's 1992 exhibition 'Still Lives' at Galerie Besson in London, used terms including 'obsessive zeal', ruthless standards', and 'exhausting frenetic life', to describe her working methods and lifestyle during the periods when she worked in England and France. Margrie however used very different terminology when he commented on the work itself, stating: 'but the pots flowed in a different direction possessed of a meditative calmness, a kind of silence, listening. They are pots that come to you quietly, without self-importance, yet with the authority of an individual voice.'[90] Even though Margrie was here referring to Hanssen Pigott's work from the 1960s and early 1970s, as opposed to the pots in the then current exhibition, his comments were equally relevant to them.

Although this thesis is concerned with the assemblages of Hanssen Pigott's later career, as these were composed of individual vessels which were still functional pots, and thus direct descendants in a steady line of progression from the accomplished utilitarian pots intended

89. Ibid., p.17.
90. Victor Margrie, Gwyn Hanssen Pigott 'Still Lives', Galerie Besson, 1992, unpaginated.

for everyday use produced early in her career, it is relevant to consider the qualities that these pots possessed, evoking the 'meditative calmness' to which Margrie referred.

The work that Hanssen Pigott began making in her studio in London in the early 1960s reached its peak in the tableware that she produced in France. There is nothing in excess, no added decoration or embellishments, just the reductive spare forms with their totally appropriate and complementary surfaces. I contacted Hanssen Pigott in 2008 to request some images of her work made during the earlier years of her career, for a talk that I was giving at the Sturt International Woodfire Conference. She chose as her favourite pieces two bowls which had been produced in France.[91] The first is a shallow form, less than 8cm in height and 36cm in diameter (Figure 38, page 227), described as 'salt-glazed stoneware (wood-fired)'. The surface has two main tones – beige and pale brown, and bears evidence of flyash from the firing. The second, described as a 'coffee drinking bowl', is the same height, and 13cm in diameter (Figure 39, page 227), and unlike the first stands on a foot ring. Both bowls have much in common with those that Hanssen Pigott found so inspiring from the classic wares of China and Korea.

It is, I consider, significant that Hanssen Pigott chose these two simple bowls as her favourite pieces from all the work produced throughout those early years spent working in Britain and France. Perhaps they pleased her as she may have considered that they possessed, or came close to possessing some of the qualities she so admired in the pots that had been her first inspiration in the Kent Collection in Melbourne. When Hanssen Pigott's work is considered alongside these examples of Chinese Sung ware that inspired it, it is clear that she succeeded in achieving very similar qualities both from a technical point of view, but more importantly, and more difficult to define, in terms of the mood evoked, which could perhaps be described as one of quiet contemplative calmness. Terms that have been uses to describe the classic Sung wares are equally applicable to Hanssen Pigott's work – restrained, elegant, serene, austere. This applies not only to the later body of work in which it could be said that these qualities have been expressed to an ultimate level, but also to work that she made as early as the 1960s (Figure 35, page 223).

91. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, e-mail to the author 8th February 2008.

The bowl was a particular focus for Hanssen Pigott throughout her career. She spoke about this in terms of her throwing, that she concentrated on the interiors of forms rather than the profiles, and wondered whether this might have had something to do with the fact that she was left-handed. She also made reference to the fact that McMeekin was left-handed, as was Cardew, and stated that she 'felt completely at home with them both'.[92]

*Shell*, the piece chosen to illustrate the cover of Hanssen Pigott's 2005 retrospective exhibition was a wood-fired Limoges porcelain bowl with a pale blue glaze, measuring 11.0 x 21.8 x 16.8cm (Figure 45, page 233). What is unusual here is that generally just two dimensions are listed for bowls – height and diameter. The fact that there is a 5cm difference between 'widths' gives an idea as to the extent of the distortion of the elliptical rim, probably due to a combination of having been pushed out of shape whilst still damp (or dampened again after the final trimming to aid distortion), and further slight warping that occurred in the woodfiring of such a thinly walled porcelain vessel. This piece, which could be described simply as a blue glazed bowl, is so much more than that, as can be seen from the fineness of the throwing/turning, the delicacy of the colour of the glaze, the naturally flowing line of the rim 'thin as a pencil line', and the balance of the overall form. Like the classic Chinese bowls that inspired it, it has a presence that transcends its physical properties.

One of the features of Hanssen Pigott's work is that individual pieces such as this, when considered carefully – contemplated, are equally capable of evoking a quietness of mood and a meditative calmness, as the extensive still life arrangements comprised of multiple vessels. They speak to the viewer in a different way – at a more intimate and personal level.

Alison Britton chose Hanssen Pigott's work for inclusion in *The Raw and the Cooked*, the groundbreaking exhibition of 'New Work in Clay in Britain', organised by the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, in 1993, which she co-curated with Martina Margetts. (The curators were, as Britton stated 'stretching a point' on Hanssen Pigott's nationality. It had been almost thirty years since she had worked in Britain.) In her curatorial essay 'Use, Beauty, Ugliness and Irony' Britton wrote:

92. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, taped interview with Tanya Harrod, 2005, Aberystwyth University Ceramics Archive.

> That something as concrete as a pot can be regarded as 'abstract' may seem problematic. The sort of pots that are part of this exhibition do not have utility uppermost in their offerings. They are operating like other abstract works of art in that they are aesthetic compositions of three dimensional form (hollow in this case), colours, and surfaces. They make suggestions, references to other sorts of form, other objects, perhaps, or attempt to symbolise states of feeling or ideas. They are carriers of meaning, open to interpretation by the beholder, of a subliminal kind.[93]

Hanssen Pigott's pots – the elements that made up her assemblage – are likely to have been more suggestive of, and closer to, an actual prescribed function than much of the other work shown in the exhibition. Yet, they were by then primarily 'abstract works of art', having been transformed on being removed from the usual environment where use could occur, and placed together in a group so that they were now literally seen in a different light – as objects of contemplation.

In 2000, when she had been concentrating on her assemblages for twelve years, Hanssen Pigott wrote:

> I am sure that forms of the most common, everyday utensils can evoke so much that is inexpressible in any other language about humanness. That with only the slightest gesture, the merest suggestion of the lip of a jug, or a pouring spout, or the lightest softening of a curve can be expressed a sort of vulnerability, or a tenderness that causes us to pause.[94]

It was continuing to explore the possibilities for this expression that engaged Hanssen Pigott's attention for the ensuing thirteen years of her practice. Placing what appeared to be everyday household pottery forms, with which everybody was familiar and could easily identify, in an arrangement that resembled a still life painting, caused the viewer to hesitate – stop in their tracks and look again. The attention of the sensitive observer was held by the mood evoked by the assemblages, their quietness. This was the greatest measure of Hanssen Pigott's success.

She explained regarding the process involved in arranging her still lifes:

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93. 'Use, Beauty, Ugliness and Irony', essay by Alison Britton in the catalogue of *The Raw and the Cooked*, the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, 1993, p.11.
94. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, 'Truth in Form', in *The Return to Beauty*, exhibition catalogue, The Jam Factory, 2000, p.12.

> The fire, you see, for all its life-giving touch, is not the last event. Now I get to look, very carefully, at all that has happened. I can scrutinise all those different shapes, made slowly, with a sort of family resemblance (or even an emotion) in mind; glazed with tones and shadows and congruencies in mind, placed in the kiln with the flame path or the protecting shelf cover in mind. I get to know them, at last, and to sense their belongings and relationships. I sit back, as it were, and give the work its space. I shuffle the pots and manipulate, and watch. I have to be in neutral.[95]

The arrangements were not planned at the making, glazing, or firing stage, but at the post-firing stage. Hanssen Pigott made a certain number of each form for every firing and glazed them in a range of different glazes. Post-firing it was necessary to smoothen the base of each piece, and it was at this point that she began to consider forms that might work together. In arranging the pieces she carefully considered the space between forms. In the final interview that she gave, Hanssen Pigott commented on this aspect of her creative process:

> Feeling or mood wise, colour wise, form wise – these are such subjective matters. I'm looking for quietness. It's not analytical when I put them together. You know when it is finished. […] It's about a sense of beauty. Stillness is a quality that I love.'

She continued by discussing her attraction to this quality in the context of her meditation practice, explaining that 'the still point is the most precious. That's where joy resides'.[96]

The power of Hanssen Pigott's work to have a calming quiet effect was recognised not only by private collectors who acquired assemblages for display in their homes, but also by those commissioning works for permanent installation in public buildings. She was one of nine artists selected to produce work for installation in the new courthouse in Ipswich, Queensland in 2009. *Parade*, Hanssen Pigott's installation, is displayed in a glass sided case inserted into the wall dividing the main foyer from the registry waiting area on the ground floor, forming 'a translucent slit'.[97] The purpose of the artwork in the building was to ameliorate the stresses and tensions that are often attendant on being in a courthouse. Hanssen Pigott's installation, consisting of 81 individual porcelain forms succeeds in creating a contemplative and calming focus in this busy public space.

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95. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, quoted in Minogue and Sanderson, 2000, p.17.
96. BL/CL Gwyn Hanssen Pigott.
97. *The Art & Architecture of the Ipswich Courthouse Queensland Australia*, Arts Queensland, p.29.

## 5.7: The influence and legacy of Gwyn Hanssen Pigott's work

In *Postmodern Ceramics* (2001), in a section under the heading 'The Multiple Vessel', Mark Del Vecchio stated:

> From Picasso to Giorgio Morandi, Vincent Van Gogh, and Georges Braque, pottery has tended to be the visual anchor of most still-life compositions. Contemporary ceramists have begun to reverse the compliment and draw inspiration from the paintings in which these pots appear, returning them to the three-dimensional realm, but retaining some painterly associations.
>
> British-born Andrew Lord was not the first artist to see the promise in reversing the still-life process. Lucio Fontana, for instance, had done this in the 1940s. But Lord is the artist who radicalised the concept and took it further than anyone before or since.[98]

Based in the USA since 1981, Lord began producing the work that Del Vecchio referenced in the 1970s. In his early ceramic pieces he was concerned with presenting objects that are common subjects in historical still life paintings, such as jug and vase forms. The surfaces of Lord's ceramics were treated in a painterly manner that recalled the work of painters including Cézanne, Monet, and Picasso. In a review of a 1978 exhibition of Lord's work, Tony Birks stated: 'Some of his cubist sets have the strange achievement of springing into three dimensions cubist forms that had been distilled down to two on canvas.'[99]

In the years since Del Vecchio's book was published there has been a dramatic increase in the number of artists and potters working in the ceramic still life genre, and also in the range and scale of the work produced. In starting to produce her assemblages as early as 1988, Hanssen Pigott was one of the first to do so. When they were first exhibited there were no comparable examples of functional pots made by a professional potter of long standing being exhibited in such arrangements. Gradually as her work received more exposure through exhibitions and in magazines, others began to place pots in multiple groupings in relation to each other. Almost all of these potters were making work which was at the quieter end of the colour scale, similar to Hanssen Piggott's. However, none of these potters were using wood-fired components in their assemblages or installations.

98. Mark Del Vecchio, *Postmodern Ceramics*, p.70.
99. Tony Birks, review of *Andrew Lord – Pottery*, exhibition at Anthony Stokes Gallery London, June–July 1978, *Ceramic Review*, Sept./Oct. 1978, pp.20–21.

Perhaps unsurprisingly Hanssen Pigott's impact on still life assemblage was particularly powerful in Australia. In the April 2018 issue of *The Journal of Australian Ceramics* in an article titled 'Still: National Still Life Award', in a review of this inaugural national multi-media exhibition and competition which was open to all artists and mediums, Cath Fogarty wrote 'With a background in ceramics, it's hard for me to think about still life without Gwyn Hanssen Pigott's work coming to mind and its relationship to Morandi'. There were thirteen ceramic still lifes in the final sixty-three exhibited works, selected from a total of 605 entries.[100]

While it appeared that some of the potters who began creating still lives were choosing to assemble their pots in a somewhat arbitrary fashion, others have persevered and made the genre their own. Their success has come from bringing a new perspective to the field. I will consider the work of two of these potters here.

Edmund de Waal contributed a short text to the catalogue of Hanssen Pigott's exhibition at Galerie Besson (London) in 2000, in which he remarked:

> Like Morandi's paintings with which these works have a complex relationship, the same objects change under different scrutiny. Morandi, famously, painted the same drug jars and beakers throughout his life: Gwyn Hanssen Pigott has taken forms which she has made a thousand times before in her incarnation as a tableware potter and has distilled them further. By placing them in these groups she makes us aware of still life […] of Morandi: she pushes three-dimensional objects towards the picture plane. […] But […] they remain pots that can be picked up, a picture that can be disrupted. They are pots that do cross over from the cupboard to contemplation.[101]

At this time de Waal was not yet well known for creating still lives. His work of the following years was frequently produced in response to existing collections in museums – temporary interventions in specific, often historic spaces. One of his best known works *Signs and Wonders* (2009) consisting of 425 individual pieces, was commissioned to coincide with the redevelopment of the ceramics galleries at the Victoria and Albert Museum. It is sited in a lacquer-red metal channel, running the circumference of the dome that surmounts the main entrance to the museum. This work was innovative in the field of ceramic still life

100. *The Journal of Australian Ceramics,* Vol. 57, No. 1, pp.82–87. The exhibition was shown at Coffs Harbour Regional Gallery, 24 Nov. 2017–18 Jan. 2018, Coffs Harbour, NSW, Australia.
101. Edmund de Waal, *Gwyn Hanssen Pigott*, Galerie Besson, 2000, unpaginated.

assemblages in several respects, including the number of individual pieces from which it is composed; its circular formation; the contrast between the subdued and subtle tones of the pots and the striking red metal 'support/base'. But most significant is the positioning of the pots at a height where they cannot be reached or seen in detail. Having placed functional pots in a still life assemblage, and thus conceptually out of reach, de Waal in this work went a step further – by physically positioning the work out of reach.

Hanssen Pigott's work was shown with Morandi's for a second time in the exhibition *Less is More* at Newcastle Regional Art Gallery (NSW) in 2011, further to the 1987 Crafts Council of South Australia exhibition already mentioned. The exhibition brought the two artists together to celebrate work that is 'all about essence; the metaphysical expressed through the solidly physical and knowable'. This quote used in publicity material for the exhibition was Hanssen Pigott's. She considered that the exhibition was very important for her and stated: 'I was astounded by and loved the fact that my works were in the same room as Morandi's beautiful works.'[102] The gallery director had managed to obtain four of the five Morandi paintings in Australia for the exhibition, as well as other works on paper.

Six years after Hanssen Pigott's Newcastle exhibition de Waal's work was shown alongside Morandi's in a major exhibition in Sweden. Over fifty of Morandi's paintings were shown and over thirty works by de Waal. The publicity for the exhibition on the web site of the gallery where the exhibition was held, Artipelag in Stockholm, stated that it was not ceramics – those shown in Morandi's paintings and those made by de Waal 'that unites these two artists here, but rather the encouragement of mindful viewing and contemplation'.[103]

One of the main differences between Hanssen Pigott's work and de Waal's is that de Waal tends to focus on site specific installations and custom made environments for the placement of his work, a point that was evident in the installations shown by both potters in the *Things of Beauty Growing* 2018 exhibition. de Waals piece, consisting of 120 porcelain vessels, incorporated a custom-built wall-mounted vitrine, constructed from wood, aluminium and glass.

102. Gwyn Hanssen Pigott interviewed by *Craft Australia* magazine in June 2011. Online archive accessed on 12/08/2016. www.craftaustralia.org.au
103. https://artipelag.se/en/exhibition/edmund-de-waal-giorgio-morandi

In the catalogue published to coincide with the exhibition, co-curator/editor Simon Olding stated of Hanssen Pigott's work:

> Her unalterable arrangements changed the spatial dynamics of ceramic art by proposing the group (rather than the pot) as the unit of aesthetic concern', and continued, 'These ordinary objects, when grouped according to Hanssen Pigott's exacting instructions, have a metaphorical intensity that presaged the arrangements of many studio potters since, including Edmund de Waal.

The second artist whose work bears comparison with that of Hanssen Pigott is her fellow Australian Kirsten Coelho. Coelho's work, which on one level shares many features with Hanssen Pigott's, evokes a somewhat different mood. As with Hanssen Pigott, each of the elements in Coelho's arrangements is exquisitely made, but somehow the word 'pots' does not seem as appropriate to describe them – they are objects. They appear to be more industrial in nature than Hanssen Pigott's. Earlier work was reminiscent of enamelled tin – with dark bands of colour on rims of vessels with uniform matt glazes of a single tone.

In Coelho's 2015 exhibition at the Drill Hall Gallery at the Australian National University in Canberra, the pieces were less like enamelled tin, the forms somewhat softer. The arrangements consisted of bottles, bowls – some shallow and wide, others proportionally taller with foot rings – cylindrical lidded canisters, and beaker forms, all in porcelain. Some pieces were referred to as vases, a form that, as far as I am aware, Hanssen Pigott never made throughout her career. Most were in a matt white glaze, the rims banded with iron oxide saturated glaze. A few pieces were glazed all over in the iron glaze providing a stark contrast to the more frequently occurring paler forms. Some forms referenced vernacular Australian objects.

In the essay in the accompanying catalogue Wendy Walker stated that Coelho 'views her highly refined vessels as abstractions […] rather than literal interpretations'.[104] Coelho's concerns include the interplay of light and shadow in the arrangement of objects and the potential to convey mood, 'the quiet, yet powerful assemblages […] constitute an invitation to slow down, to give some time for contemplation'.[105] The sentiments thus expressed

104. Wendy Walker, *Kirsten Coelho: In the falling light*, exhibition catalogue, Australian National Gallery, 2015, unpaginated.
105. Wendy Walker, Ibid.

closely echo those of Hanssen Pigott. Coelho stated in 2004 that 'the experience of viewing Hanssen Pigott's 'still life' groupings led to my interest in conveying a sense of the contemplative and quietude in my own work'.[106]

The work of all three artists is made from porcelain. Of the three, Hanssen Pigott used many more glaze combinations and contrasts. While celadon is one of the most famous of the glazes used on Sung wares, and she was clearly inspired by the forms of these celadon wares, Hanssen Pigott avoided using it on her work, as she explained in the British Library taped interviews, 'so that there isn't a history involved that might make people think of something else as they are looking at them, so that you see them [the glazes] as neutral colour and not in terms of ceramic history.'[107] de Waal on the other hand, has made extensive use of celadon type glazes in his work. Hanssen Pigott's is the only work of the three potters in which subtle variation on the glazed surfaces of individual pieces was achieved through the use of the woodfire process.

By placing her pots in a particular arrangement and continuing this practice to great acclaim Hanssen Pigott caused other potters to consider the placing and arrangement of their own work, and perhaps to be more insistent on the importance of this aspect of the showing of their work in galleries. Asked how she felt when other people started making groupings of their pots, Hanssen Pigott replied that she did not feel threatened by this, and continued, 'Because you develop your own rules – your own eye, looking at other peoples work I would think how could they do that. Sometimes I would think that some people's work was approaching mine fairly closely – but what can you do?'[108]

Hanssen Pigott's work in the ceramic still life genre led to her involvement in other innovative projects, or perhaps more accurately curatorial interventions. Again this is a field where others have followed. Projects included an installation at the Freer Gallery of Art and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery of the Smithsonian Institute in Washington (DC, USA), involving the selection of historic pots from the collections to create arrangements. Under discussion since 1999, the project came to fruition in 2007, when *Parades: Freer Ceramics*

106. Kirsten Coelho, 'The Interpretation of the Metaphoric Through the Integration of North Asian and Western Ceramic Practices', unpublished MA Thesis, The University of South Australia, 2004.
107. BL/CL Gwyn Hanssen Pigott.
108. Ibid.

*Installed by Gwyn Hanssen Pigott* was exhibited, while an exhibition of her new work was displayed concurrently at the Australian Embassy in Washington. Publicity for the Freer installations included the following background to the project:

> Ms. Pigott was invited to visit Freer Gallery ceramics storage to assemble groups from the gallery's permanent collection, she chose at will from cases of Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and Near Eastern vessels. Ignoring date and place and focusing wholly on colour, form, pattern, and relationship, her approach was curiously sympathetic to the taste of Charles Lang Freer, who had chosen most of the selected objects a century earlier. Ms. Pigott's seven creations will gather seventy-two Freer ceramics in surprising new relationships.[109]

In 2012, Hanssen Pigott had another opportunity to work with Museum collections when she was invited by the curator of the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia in Canada, to make selections for arrangements from the museums collections. This project was different from that at the Freer, in that this time Hanssen Pigott had the opportunity to choose, not just from the ceramics collections, but from across the entire Museum – a total of 38,000 objects. The result was an installation of 18 groupings made up of 120 objects. Some of Hanssen Pigott still life assemblages were shown in this installation, including a series of seven bowls made in Shigaraki.[110] The same group was also included in her final exhibition at Erskine, Hall and Coe in London in June 2013.

## Conclusion

Throughout all the different stages of Hanssen Pigott's career, in a long succession of studios in three different countries, she maintained a level of production to a standard that attracted admiration and support from the outset. The groundbreaking assemblages produced in the last phase of her career contributed to a new form of expression in ceramics. She continued to woodfire these reductive austere forms, embodying an aesthetic in glazed wood-fired ceramics that, whilst understated, brought a quality to the work that was quiet but essential; her assemblages imbued with a sense of calm and serenity. Art Dealer Rex Irwin said of Hanssen Pigott's work and of exhibiting it in his gallery in Sydney:

109. http://www.asia.si.edu/press/past/prParades.htm Accessed 2017.
110. The exhibition was shown from 3rd Nov. 2012 to 24th March 2013.

> When a picture gallery starts to exhibit the work of ceramic artists it is a big decision because ceramics have a totally different dynamic to pictures, a different dimension and they are fragile. This makes for a considered decision but when the artist concerned is Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, one of the most remarkable artists of our time, it is an easy decision to make. The apparent simplicity of Hanssen Pigott's work has been achieved by years of work, of understanding the medium and by a tireless energy to create something that captures a moment of stillness, something that is perfect.[111]

In the final interview Hanssen Pigott gave she was asked what influence she thought she had on ceramics. She replied, 'I hope that maybe I've made other people value handmade pots for use … [that] I've encouraged people to look at pots in their homes'.[112] She was referring not only to those who bought her work – the purely functional pots of the first thirty years of her career, and the later assemblages exhibited in fine art galleries, but also the potters who, inspired by her still lifes, began to consider their own work more carefully, more deeply, and to see that, it too perhaps, had the capacity to express something beyond function.

111. Rex Irwin, catalogue of Gwyn Hanssen Pigott's 2006 exhibition at Rex Irwin (Art Dealer) Gallery in Sydney (unpaginated).
112. BL/CL Gwyn Hanssen Pigott.

# Chapter 6: Summary and Conclusion

## Overview

This thesis is concerned with work which has surface qualities derived from the process of woodfiring that can be described as subtle and quiet. Each of the featured potters/artists used different materials, tools, and firing processes to achieve their aesthetic goals. In the work of all three, the term quiet can be applied more broadly than a reference to surface, and extends to the characteristics of individual pieces and their ability to evoke a sense of quietness. It is these qualities – quietness of surface and quietness of mood – that unifies their work.

It is relevant here to consider some possible reasons why such work has become increasingly popular in recent years. Has its appeal grown in the digital age because people are becoming more detached from actual objects? Few now engage with objects that have been made by hand, and many are seeking quiet and calm in a frenetically paced and digitally dominated world.

In the introduction to the catalogue accompanying the exhibition *Things of Beauty Growing*, co-editor Glenn Adamson discusses possible reasons why an exhibition of British studio pottery should be appropriate at this particular point in time. Stating that 'the medium of pottery is well positioned to tell stories about cultural exchange, aesthetic concern, and philosophical reflection', to this he adds another possible explanation, 'quietness'. Adamson contrasts this quietness with aspects of contemporary life including art and design, which he writes, have 'a tendency towards spectacle', while, 'Pots, like much that is worthwhile in human creativity, are not insistent. They do not demand attention; they earn it.'[1] Several pieces by Pleydell-Bouverie, as well as an installation of fourteen vessels by Hanssen Pigott were included in this exhibition. Even though Adamson was referring to all of the work on show – representative of a very broad range of concepts, themes, forms, firing techniques, and clay types, under the heading of 'British Studio Pottery' his remarks seem particularly appropriate for their work.

There is currently considerable media discussion on the increasing interest in hand-made pottery – from television programmes, to a growing demand for classes from those eager

1. Glenn Adamson, Introduction, *Things of Beauty Growing – British Studio Pottery*, Yale University Press, 2017, p.27.

to learn the techniques involved. In a feature in *The Guardian* Culture pages online (18th April 2018) under the heading 'Top of the pots: the smashing rise of ceramics', one commentator gave his view on the relatively sudden growth in interest in learning pottery:

> If you pick up a pot – which is shorthand for any ceramic object – a lot of it is about texture and there's no way to digitise it. There are no short cuts in the making. […] It's so rudely analogue that it's an antidote to the analytical, screen-based way that most of us spend our working, and a big chunk of our non-working, lives. People are craving physical experience.[2]

The screen-based activities referred to here often involve constant moving images. Visiting exhibitions in galleries and museums can now also involve screen-based information technology. The types of pottery discussed in this thesis are in marked contrast to this kind of experience. They offer an opportunity for quietness and stillness, for contemplation in calm tranquillity. This is, I believe, an important aspect of their attraction for contemporary audiences and collectors.

**Employing original creative approaches to produce innovative ranges of work incorporating woodfire methodologies that resulted in quiet surface effects, the three makers produced work that evokes an overall sense of quietness**

Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, Jacqueline Lerat and Gwyn Hanssen Pigott produced wood-fired glazed and unglazed work with surface effects that can be appropriately described as quiet. To achieve these surface effects they used specific materials in making and processes in firing.

Pleydell-Bouverie's subdued coloured glazes are in harmony with nature, their matt surfaces have qualities that are reminiscent of stone and other natural materials and objects. The surfaces of Jacqueline Lerat's abstract sculptures were worked on in such a way that in their fired state, the natural tones achieved complemented and accentuated the forms. Hanssen Pigott used a series of glazes all of which were muted in colour. Woodfiring added another dimension to the glazed surfaces creating a soft, quiet bloom.

2. Toby Brundin (director of Ceramic Art London), quoted in *The Guardian* Culture section online (18th April 2018).

'Quietness' in reference to works of art can be considered a somewhat vague term. In the context of this study I have taken it as meaning calm or tranquil, work that has the capacity to slow one down, to encourage contemplation, and perhaps also meditation.

Throughout Pleydell-Bouverie's career, classic Chinese Sung wares were the main inspiration for her work. For Hanssen Pigott these wares strongly influenced her decision to become a potter in the first instance, and remained an abiding influence throughout her career. Before such early Chinese ceramics became available in the West in the first decades of the twentieth century, collectors' interests had focussed on later export porcelains, which were technically more proficient and often highly decorated. The ceramics of the earlier periods, specifically Sung and Tang pottery appealed to critics, collectors and potters alike for their unique combination of qualities. Numerous descriptive terms have been used to describe these qualities of both glaze and form. The glazes are monochrome – in subtle, muted shades, often with a luminous quality. The forms are simple, elegant, austere. The quality of the making, including spontaneity in throwing is completely different from the precision and sophistication of later production. The unrefined materials from which they were made contribute character to the work, and there are often 'flaws' resulting from the firing process, qualities that encouraged in studio potters the concept of 'truth to materials'. Beyond these characteristics, the pots appeal at another level. They have a presence that is calm and meditative – they are 'quiet'.

The work of certain artists, and certain artefacts come to mind in considering pieces that evoke quietness and calmness, and encourage contemplation. One thinks of Constantin Brancusi, of Alberto Giacometti, of Mark Rothko, and many others, from different eras and in different mediums across the history of mankind. To this list can be added the serene, austere, pure forms of Sung dynasty ceramics.

It is when one begins to consider the potential of each of the three very different ranges of work that are the focus of this thesis to evoke a mood of quietness and contemplative calm that it is necessary to analyse what it is about individual pieces that is responsible for this. The forms in the work of all three makers are pared back to the essential, particularly the individual components from which Hanssen Pigott's assemblages were composed, where all marks resulting from the process of hand throwing were erased, and some forms were

slip-cast, a process which does not leave any obvious trace of its making. Pleydell-Bouverie's simple and peaceful forms are eminently suitable for showing her range of restrained natural toned glazes to best advantage. Prolonged engagement with Jacqueline Lerat's sculptures – with their perfect unity of form and surface – invariably has a calming effect on the viewer. If colour is said to set the tenor of mood, then the range of muted tones in the work of all three makers is conducive to a quiet, subdued mood. They are colours that are restful and calm.

Looking beyond materials and processes, the work shares some common characteristics – individual pieces are capable of evoking a sense of quietness or calmness. The surfaces undoubtedly contributed to this effect, the range of colours and tones within which they worked, the subtle variations achieved through woodfiring. But what are the attributes of the work that make it quiet?

Pleydell-Bouverie, who as a twenty-eight year old was attracted by Leach's 'quiet coloured, gentle surfaced pots, with a pleasant sense of peace about them', sought qualities in her own work that would make people think of natural objects and their surfaces, of 'pebbles and shells and birds' eggs and the stones over which moss grows'. The simple, under-stated, yet strong forms of her pots would be easy to live with – they would not proclaim their existence in a loud way, yet one would know they were there – a calming reassuring presence. Collector, gallery owner, and ceramics dealer Paul Rice said of her work:

> If asked to name my favourite potter, there would be quite a few names before Pleydell-Bouverie's – and, yet, I find I have more pots in my collection by her than anyone else. Her pots have a rare quality. You may not notice them at first, but they creep into your heart and stay. When collectors 'weed' their collections, it is seldom her pots that go.

In Pleydell-Bouverie's work the quietness is combined with total stillness. Her best work succeeds in capturing the same characteristics as the Sung wares that were her inspiration.

Frédéric Bodet, curator at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, wrote of Jacqueline Lerat's work in the catalogue of her exhibition shown at Galerie Besson in London in 2007, when she was aged 87:

> Jacqueline offers the spectator a set of discreet references that stand beyond both time and fashion, hoping that they will serenely transmit her most intimate sentiments and, through these sculptures, 'speak' of her will to transcend the fragility of life. Such conceptions may seem incompatible with our society of stress, of 'youthism' and flashy appearances, so characterised by a ruthless struggle to survive and hysterical flitting from one consumer product to the next. For people today, who now require images and sculptures to be primarily 'spectacles', Jacqueline Lerat's anti-spectacular works can impose their own power on our gaze, only if we ourselves operate a necessary retreat into the isolation of contemplation, beyond the violence of reality, far from the world's artificiality and hype.[3]

Jacqueline's work illustrated in this thesis was created in a slow considered manner in her studio in a suburb in Bourges. During this period she worked alone. Each form took a long time to complete. The atmosphere of the environment in which she worked is reflected in the finished sculptures – the colours of the surfaces speak of this quietness. One could not imagine these forms coming from an environment where there was noise and distraction. In this work, the quiet mood is not however combined with a sense of complete stillness. Learning that modern dance was a strong source of inspiration for her work comes as no surprise. Much of it references movement, balance, and tension, but one senses that these are slow, considered movements. In the later work her personal frailty and limitation of movement was a preoccupation that is reflected in the titles of some of these pieces.

Sara Hughes, Curator at Tate St Ives, writing in the catalogue of Hanssen Pigott's 2010 exhibition at Galerie Besson stated:

> The works engage us because they reflect an approach to life, a tenacity, a patience of mind and a universal humanism that is often overlooked in the frenetic demands of daily existence. These quiet meditations into the beauty of domestic vessels indeed captivate and impel the viewer far beyond the day-to-day.[4]

Through each phase of Hanssen Pigott's career her pots were acknowledged for their quiet, peaceful, and contemplative qualities. These qualities culminated in her later still life assemblages. Though from the outside it may have appeared that Hanssen Pigott's life was somewhat frenetic, with many different changes in location, there was however a central calmness, to which no doubt her practice of meditation on a daily basis for the latter forty

3. This essay was also published as a preview of the exhibition in *The Log Book*, issue 30, 2007, pp.24–26).
4. Sara Hughes, *Gwyn Hanssen Pigott*, catalogue for exhibition at Galerie Besson, London, 9th June– 8th July 2010, unpaginated.

years of her life contributed. The extent to which this practice may have influenced Hanssen Pigott's work has not been the subject of research. The assemblages, some of which can be read as metaphors for aspects of the human condition, have an unexpected power to engage, to become lost in thought, to wonder.

Hanssen Pigott's earlier assemblages were 'Still Lifes' and the embodiment of this genre. They are static, without even a hint of movement. As her work progressed and the arrangements included more individual vessels, a feeling of movement developed. This fact is reflected in titles that she gave her arrangements, including *Parade*, *Caravan*, *Trail,* and *Exodus*. The spaces between the forms became increasingly important in contributing to this sense of movement, as the arrangements are observed from left to right or right to left. Although there is a sense of movement, it is just a suggestion that movement is possible, and the pieces as we are seeing them at this particular moment are frozen in time, captured at a stage in transition

The work of all three potters/artists requires us to slow down, to spend time with it, to give it attention. More is revealed on prolonged viewing. It provides an opportunity to engage at a level beyond the material.

**How, and the context in which the work was viewed impacted on its ability to encourage contemplation and appreciation of its quiet qualities**

The viewing of any artwork – whether painting, drawing, sculpture, architecture, installation, or ceramic vessel – is a subjective process dependent on and influenced by many disparate factors. These include the context in which the work is shown and the ambient exhibition conditions. The receptivity of the viewer is another constituent factor; whether or not there is the potential for experiential rapport between the viewer and the work being viewed.

In discussing the experience of viewing ceramics, art historian Philip Rawson wrote:

> A work of art […] specifically invites the beholder to keep his attention open to realms of association within different sense-fields and across their boundaries. And this is what we must do when we approach a pot […] to try to grasp its meaning. We

> need to question in turn its different physical attributes and try to discover their echoes in our funds of emotively charged and formally ordered memory traces.[5]

The work created by the three makers in this study is of a kind that does not immediately try to put across any kind of a message. There are no graphic patterns that distract the attention as we try to decipher them, and no intricate decoration to engage us at a purely visual level. Instead the simple forms and subtle surfaces leave the mind free for contemplation.

Pleydell-Bouverie's pots were shown in gallery settings, that would have allowed them to be viewed as individual objects, relatively clear of distraction from nearby work, encouraging their appreciation as abstract forms. However, it was probably in private homes – her vases filled with flowers as she wished – that her work was seen to best advantage and its impact most powerfully felt.

Wanting people to notice her pots – to really see and consider them, was one of the motivating factors in Hanssen Pigott's decision to assemble them in groups in still life arrangements. In the series of interviews conducted in her final days she explained the importance of the support of the sympathetic gallerist Garry Anderson, who saw the potential in her work and decided to show it in his fine art gallery. She describes a particular occasion when he exhibited a small group of her pots in the relatively large space of one of the gallery windows, where they could be viewed from the street 'with plenty of space around them'. Contrasting this presentation with that of a craft gallery on the same street, where many different kinds of objects were competing for attention in a window display, was a defining experience for Hanssen Pigott. It illustrated to her the importance of the space around her work, and how it made such a contribution in terms of seeing it in the manner that she intended.

From the earliest days of her professional career Jacqueline Lerat's ceramic sculptures were shown in galleries and museums where they could be seen in the round, as sculpture should be seen. The later abstract sculptural forms that are focussed on here were particularly powerful when viewed in the context of a large gallery space. This was also the case in her retrospective exhibition at the French National Ceramics Museum in Sèvres in

5. Philip Rawson, *Ceramics*, (1984 edition), p.18.

2012, where any pieces were shown at the same level in the centre of the largest gallery. Here it was possible to walk around the edge of the display, thus viewing one aspect of a form in close proximity, whilst at the same time being aware of back or side views of several other pieces. The close-up viewing was rewarded by the opportunity to examine the subtle tones and worked textures of the surfaces, while with the more distant observation the strength and apparent monumentality of the forms became evident. The generous space left between the forms was a necessary component in the overall experience for the viewer. Jacqueline's sculptures also resonate as a restful calming presence in more intimate domestic settings, as displayed in her home in Bourges.

The work of all three makers benefited from being viewed in specific and appropriate settings: whether pots that have an obvious function and could be used as such – as is the case with those in Hanssen Pigott's arrangements; vessels, where a possible function is less obvious and the work is perhaps, intended more for contemplation even when combined with function – as in the case of Pleydell-Bouverie's vases complete with flowers; or sculpture, where the forms are intended purely for contemplation from the outset – as with Jacqueline Lerat's abstract sculptures. Such siting allowed for observation and contemplation emphasising the works meditative qualities, and the quietness of its physical characteristics and meditative mood could be adequately appreciated.

Of the three makers, Hanssen Pigott was the only one who provided detailed instructions for the placement of her pots in relation to each other within a specific space, and the appropriate angle and height at which they should be viewed. The earlier assemblages called on the viewer to observe from one set position, whereas the later more complex arrangements rewarded being walked around and viewed from multiple angles.

**The influence of the three potters/artists extended beyond the specialist areas of woodfiring and wood-fired ceramics, into the broader field of contemporary ceramics**

The impact of Pleydell-Bouverie's work is more difficult to evaluate than that of the two other makers. Research into ash glazes has continued as a vibrant area within pottery since the start of the studio pottery movement. For many Western potters who were attracted by the qualities of the classic Chinese glazes, experiments in creating glazes that included ash was an attractive prospect, as a means of attempting to achieve similar effects in their own

work. Pleydell-Bouverie was one of the first to conduct research in this area in the mid-1920s, and countless others have followed since then. However, it is not easy to assess how many of these may have benefitted directly from her research.

Pleydell-Bouverie's glaze recipes have been widely circulated in magazines, catalogues and books, including Leach's *A Potter's Book*, and her glaze notebook containing almost 500 recipes is deposited in the Craft Study Centre, where it is available as a reference source. Emmanuel Cooper wrote of the importance of Pleydell-Bouverie's 'sound, practical approach to glaze-making, so clearly expressed', stating that it was much appreciated by potters who attended a talk that she gave at the CPA in the mid-1960s, as well as those who visited her or wrote for advice at a time when there was not much information available on the formulation of stoneware glazes.[6] Commenting on the two 'widely distributed' articles that Pleydell-Bouverie wrote on the preparation of ash and its use in glazes for *Ceramic Review* in in 1970, Cooper stated that they had become 'the standard approach for many potters'.[7]

While it is widely acknowledged that the work produced in the first fifteen-years of her practice, during the woodfire phase, possessed qualities that were never equalled in her subsequent work, Pleydell-Bouverie succeeded in producing what Cooper described as 'glazes with soft and subtle colours, matt surfaces and delicate crackles'[8] in the later stages of her career. Suitable for firing in oxidation, the availability of the recipes for these glazes made ash glaze calculation assessable to a wide range of potters with an interest in the subject.

Pleydell-Bouverie was among five potters to whom Phil Rogers devoted an individual chapter section in his 1991 book *Ash Glazes* (reprinted in 2003). Rogers discussed the importance of Pleydell-Bouverie's research within the broader context of the specialist field. Several of her pots were illustrated and corresponding glaze recipes were included in the eight-page feature.

6. Emmanuel Cooper, 'Introduction to the Glaze Recipes', CC 1986, p.51.
7. Ibid., p.52.
8, Ibid., p.51.

The extent of the possible influence from Pleydell-Bouverie's forms is again not easy to estimate. They were inspired by classic Chinese models, as were those of thousands of potters worldwide in the early decades of the development of the studio pottery movement. But one can image that the pleasing combination of form and glaze quality that Pleydell-Bouverie achieved has been an inspiration to many, including those who may only have seen her work illustrated in books, magazines and exhibition catalogues. Now that this work is again featuring in major exhibitions with increasing regularity, perhaps its qualities and her place in the field of stoneware glaze research will become the focus of research, which will assist in more clearly establishing the extent of her influence.

Jacqueline Lerat's life and work have been inspirational for generations of potters and artists in France, a fact that has been extensively documented, particularly in the many books, catalogues and magazine articles that have been published since her death. Much of this influence stems from the work of her later years. That her most powerful and successful pieces were created when she was in her seventies and eighties is in itself a source of inspiration. Many commentators have remarked on her perseverance and determination, and the pleasure she continued to derive from her work in the face of personal physical difficulties. The incredibly wide exposure that her work has received in the ten years since her death – in terms of exhibitions, museum acquisitions and publications – is testament to her reputation, and the respect with which her work is regarded. Sculptural wood-fired forms are produced by many of the younger generation of contemporary potters and artists working in France, in a range of woodfire practices of both shorter duration, as practiced by Jacqueline, and also long-duration firing. Many of these acknowledge a debt to Jacqueline and the other pioneering woodfire artists associated with La Borne.

Perhaps the most direct means of gaining a sense of the extent of the influence that Gwyn Hanssen Pigott has exerted across the field of contemporary ceramics, is to leaf through a sample of international ceramics magazines published in the years immediately prior to 1988, and to do the same with magazines for the period since then. The dramatic change that occurred in potters/artists arranging their work in groupings in this period can readily be observed. Up to this time, pots were generally photographed individually, rarely in groups, except as sets sharing a utilitarian function such as tea sets and coffee sets. There was not a practice of arranging pots together in groups with consideration given to the relationships between them or the negative spaces between. All of this changed in the late

1980s, and since then there has been a dramatic increase of such work. Around the same time, there was a substantial increase in the number of potters producing simplified utilitarian forms in pale colour scales. While some of these developments may be due to subliminal influences, there are many potters who acknowledge a direct influence from Hanssen Pigott, and reference this in statements about their work.

**There was a pioneering aspect to all three makers' involvement, not only in woodfiring, but pottery in general, making their practices significant from other perspectives including the periods when they began woodfiring and exploring the potential it offered to develop their work, the designs of kilns that they used, and the research they carried out**

When Pleydell-Bouverie began her practice in 1925, becoming involved full time in pottery was still a relatively unusual occupation. There were no precedents for a woman in the West working as a studio potter and establishing a workshop incorporating a large two-chamber oriental-style kiln. She was second only to Leach in using such a type of kiln (Staite Murray's kilns were oil fired). The kiln, for all its problematic aspects, was in fact relatively suitable for her requirements.

Before Pleydell-Bouverie, no individual twentieth century potter in the West had carried out such extensive research into the qualities it was possible to achieve through the use of wood and plant ash in the composition of glazes inspired by those of the classic Oriental wares. But Pleydell-Bouverie was far more than a researcher of glazes. It was the combination of her glazes and the powerful thrown forms to which they were applied that was responsible for the success of her work, ensured her place in the history of studio pottery in the West, and continues to resonate with contemporary audiences.

Jacqueline Lerat was the first woman in the new wave of artists to arrive in La Borne from 1941 onwards. When her practice began in 1943, she may well have been the first French woman with an art school background to work as a potter within the context of a traditional pottery village. Her woodfire practice, which continued from 1943 to 2008, must be one of, if not the longest continuous woodfire practice by a ceramic artist/sculptor in the twentieth/twenty-first centuries. The two kilns that she used from 1945–1955 and 1955–2008 were of an innovative design suitable for use in a small individual studio practice.

In starting to create abstract sculpture in unglazed wood-fired stoneware as early as the 1950s, Jacqueline, together with her husband Jean, was at the forefront of the development of this genre. They were influential in keeping woodfiring central to their practice, illustrating the role that it could play in producing modernist sculpture, and demonstrating its appropriateness as a medium for such expression.

When Gwyn Hanssen Pigott began her three-year apprenticeship with Ivan McMeekin in 1955, which incorporated firing in a woodfire kiln, and prospecting for appropriate materials for clays and glazes, she was probably the first woman in Australia to undertake such training. The kilns she used throughout her career were all based on the Bourry-box type, and she incorporated specific features to customise the design for the subtle woodfire effects that she wished to achieve on the glazed surfaces of her austere minimalist vessels.

Hanssen Pigott's decision to place exquisitely made and eminently usable wood-fired domestic vessels in permanent arrangements exhibited in fine art galleries represented a new expression in ceramic art. From the first relatively awkward assemblages produced in 1988, she continued to refine her pots, developing and extending their expressive possibilities, whilst concentrating on a limited number of forms over the following twenty-five years. Within the field of studio pottery few developments caused as much surprise and some would say, bewilderment. Had Hanssen Pigott come from a fine art background and created assemblages of domestic objects, perhaps as something of a diversion from working in other media, the perplexity may not have been as great. It was the fact that by then she had built a reputation over the previous thirty years as the maker of some of the finest domestic pottery produced within the context of the studio pottery movement in the twentieth century that caused such surprise. Although the pots were still recognisably hers, the innovative factor was that they were now intended for viewing in a completely new way, which did not involve use.

**In conclusion**

Taking the work of three potters and artists whose professional practices began as early as 1925, I have shown how ceramic work possessing certain qualities can encourage feelings of quietness and calmness in those who contemplate it. The quiet surface qualities that

they achieved through individual processes combined with woodfiring contributed to this effect.

While it could be argued that similar work made by other practitioners, which has not been wood-fired, can be equally successful in evoking these feelings, I have shown that the woodfire effects that the three makers achieved contributed another dimension to their work – a harmony of surface and form – that added to its overall quiet qualities in a manner that could not have been achieved by any other means.

The role that woodfiring played in their practices was acknowledged by each of the makers: Pleydell–Bouverie describing her woodfire kiln as 'an inspired partner' compared to kilns fired with oil or electricity; Jacqueline Lerat continuing to fire with wood throughout the entire sixty-five years of her career; Hanssen Pigott always returning to woodfiring, after periods when it had not been possible for her to fire with wood.

Each of the three makers sought qualities that went beyond achieving subtle tones in clay bodies and glazes, and strove to produce quiet, matt finishes in their work. Pleydell-Bouverie's dislike of shiny surfaces was based on her desire to produce pots that were evocative of natural objects. Jacqueline Lerat ceased salt glazing early in her career as she considered that the shiny surface it produced was no longer appropriate for her abstract sculptural forms. Thereafter she continually experimented to develop combinations of materials that resulted in subtly textured quiet surfaces. Hanssen Pigott continued to woodfire, seeking a softness, a cloudiness, or bloom on her glazes, which she hoped would diminish an overly glossy finish, by reducing reflection from their surfaces.

It was these wood-fired surface characteristics in combination with the understated and restrained forms that they each produced, that gave their work the capacity to create an emotional response in viewers, encouraging a mood of quietness and meditative calm.

**Suggestions for further research**

1. The current research is adding to the field of study in drawing attention to the area of subtle woodfire effects and associated aesthetics, in contrast to work resulting from long-duration woodfiring inspired by Oriental methodologies and ceramics. A comparison of these two specialist areas is suggested as a possible subject for future research.

2. The current study suggests investigation of the contemplative qualities and metaphysical dimension of certain genres of ceramics as an area for possible future research.

3. Though beyond the remit of the current study, the extensive research into ash glazes that has been conducted within the context of the studio pottery movement also merits academic investigation.

4. Almost all of the literature that has been published on Jacqueline Lerat and her contemporaries who settled in and around La Borne is in French. An English language study of their work and contribution to the development of ceramic sculpture in Europe in the twentieth century, contributing to its acceptance as a recognised art form, is another suggestion for future research endeavour. Such a study would facilitate comparisons between the practices of these artists and their contemporaries in other countries.

5. A comparative study examining the development of ceramic sculpture on the West Coast of the USA in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and in France at a similar period is a subject that merits in-depth study.

6. Another topic suggested for research is the development of woodfire practices in the West in the second half of the twentieth century; the emergence and evolution of 'a woodfire movement', and an analysis of whether a 'movement', as such, exists.

**What has been achieved in this thesis**

This thesis has examined the work of three potters and artists who practiced in the twentieth century and in the case of two, their practices continued into the present century. It has involved new research including interviews and correspondence with primary

sources. The work of these makers had not previously been considered together, nor had the role that woodfiring played in the effects that they achieved been examined. Work displaying subtle woodfire effects and its associated aesthetics have not previously been singled out as an area of research, or differentiated from work and associated aesthetics resulting from long-duration firing, displaying more pronounced woodfire effects.

The research contributes to the literature on the aesthetics associated with particular areas of specialisation within wood-fired ceramics in the West since the emergence of the studio pottery movement in the early twentieth century. It has made an original contribution to knowledge by building on the research carried out, and identifying and analysing the potential of specific woodfire effects to contribute to qualities of quietness in pots, vessels, sculptural forms, and still life installations.

Prior to this study, the range of quiet and subtle woodfire effects and their associated aesthetics that have been examined, had not been considered as contributing factors in work that has the capacity to evoke quiet, meditative, and contemplative moods. The current research has thus introduced new perspectives to the body of knowledge on the methodologies and associated aesthetic outcomes of woodfire practice in the West in the twentieth/twenty-first centuries.

## Glossary of Terms

| | |
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| Alkaline glaze | A glaze made of wood ash or lime, clay and sand. |
| Alumina | Aluminium oxide ($Al_2O_3$) is a chemical compound of aluminium and oxygen used as a refractory material due to its high melting point. |
| Anagama | A single-chamber cave or tunnel kiln (Japanese). |
| Ash | The inorganic residue of the burnt remains of animal and vegetable matter. |
| Ash glaze | A glaze that contains ash as its predominant flux. |
| Bag wall | A wall built of firebrick diving the firebox of a kiln from the chamber where the ware is packed for firing. Its purpose is to direct flame upwards into the ware chamber and to protect the ware in the chamber from flames entering from the firebox. |
| Ball mill | An apparatus for grinding materials and pigments for use in clays and glazes. |
| Biscuit firing | The firing of pottery, usually to a temperature of approximately 1000°C, prior to the application of glaze for the glaze firing. |
| Body | A general term for clay from which pottery is made. |
| Bottle kiln | A type of up-draught kiln developed in Europe during the Industrial Revolution. |
| Bourry-box | A down-draught wood-burning firebox design. |
| Bung | A stack of saggars packed in a kiln. |
| Catenary arch | The inverted arch that a chain assumes when its ends are suspended from fixed points. |
| Catenary-arch kiln | The chamber of a kiln designed and constructed in the shape of a catenary arch. |
| Celadon | A type of glaze (of Chinese origin), either pale green or blue in colour that has been fired in reduction and contains a small amount of iron oxide. |
| Chün glaze | A high-temperature opalescent glaze (Chinese). |
| Clamming | A mixture of clay and sand used to seal cracks in a kiln door. |
| Climbing kiln | See noborigama. |
| Cross-draught kiln | A kiln where the flame travels directly across the chamber from the firebox to the chimney. |
| Damper | A refractory clay or metal plate used to adjust the draught in kiln flues and chimneys. |
| Down-draught kiln | A kiln where the flame is directed up-wards from the firebox, before being deflected off the roof of the chamber and drawn downwards to exit though vents at the base of the chamber. |

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| Engobe | Liquid clay (the same as slip). |
| Fastfire | A kiln that has been designed to fire relatively quickly (4–12 hours) compared to longer firings in traditional kilns. |
| Firebox | The area of a kiln where combustion of fuel takes place. |
| Fireclay | Clay that is capable of withstanding high temperatures. |
| Flue | A shallow / short tunnel that is incorporated in kiln designs to allow the escape of exhaust gases into the chimney. |
| Flux | An ingredient added to glazes – to aid the fusion of glaze materials during firing. |
| Flyash | The finest of ash which is produced during the burning of wood to high temperature in a kiln firebox. It is drawn through the chamber together with the flame and settles on the exposed areas of pots. At high temperature it combines and fuses with the clay surface to create a sheen or patina. In long duration firings flyash can build up to create a natural ash glaze on the surfaces of pots packed in the kiln. |
| Frit | The result of fusion of one, two or more fluxes (glass making materials) at high temperature, which are then cooled and ground to a fine powder before being included as a constituent of a glaze recipe. |
| Green ware | Unfired pottery. |
| Grog | Previously fired clay that has been ground to varying degrees of fineness and is added to clay bodies to reduce shrinkage and improve strength. Also known as *chamotte*. |
| Groundhog kiln | A single chamber, rectangular-shaped cross-draught kiln used in traditional potteries in the USA. |
| Leather-hard | Pottery which has not fully dried and can still be worked on. |
| Manabigama | A small catenary arch tube kiln suitable for short firing cycles. |
| Natural ash glaze | The glazed surface created by the build-up of flyash during firing. |
| Noborigama | A multi-chambered climbing kiln. (Japanese) |
| Olsen Fastfire kiln | A specific design of fastfire kiln designed by Frederick Olsen. |
| Oxidation | Referring to the atmospheric conditions inside a kiln chamber during firing where there is sufficient air to allow complete combustion to take place. |
| Phoenix Fastfire kiln | A specific design of fastfire kiln built by Gerry Williams USA, during a kiln building workshop at the Phoenix Workshops, New Hampshire, 1978, the plans for which were subsequently published in *Studio Potter* Vol. 7, No. 2, 1979. |
| Pyrometric cones | Small cone-shaped forms used for determining temperature in kilns, composed of a combination of materials which are calibrated so as to melt/bend at specific temperatures. |

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| Raku | A particular type and style of glazed, low fired ceramics, where the glazed, red-hot pot is removed from the kiln and immersed in combustible organic material. (Japanese) |
| Raw glaze | Glaze applied to raw, unfired work (i.e. that has not had a first or biscuit firing). |
| Reduction | Referring to the atmospheric conditions inside a kiln chamber during firing where there is insufficient air to allow for complete combustion to take place. |
| Refractory | Ceramic material capable of withstanding the highest of temperatures. |
| Saggars | Refractory ceramic containers in which glazed pottery is placed for stacking in a kiln chamber which provide protection from the direct action of the flames. |
| Salt glaze | Glaze created by the volatilisation of common salt, introduced into a kiln at high temperature. |
| Sèvres kiln | A type of kiln with down-draught firebox based on the large kilns traditionally used for firing porcelain at the Sèvres Manufactory in France. |
| Sgraffito | A method of decorating a clay surface by scratching a pattern through a generally contrasting coloured slip coating to reveal the clay body underneath. |
| Shino | A high feldspathic glaze (Japanese). |
| Silica | Silicon dioxide ($SiO_2$) one of the most important elements in pottery, commonly found in sand. |
| Six ancient kiln sites | The six oldest ceramic production areas in Japan, as categorised by Koyama Fujio (1900–1975). |
| Slip | Liquid clay (the same as engobe). |
| Slip-cast | The process of producing hollow pottery forms in plaster moulds using slip. |
| Soda glaze | Glaze created by the volatilisation of sodium oxide, introduced into the kiln at high temperature. |
| Tenmoku | A high iron content glaze, that fires to a dark brown almost black colour (Japanese). |
| Train Kiln | A modern kiln design concept, developed by John Neely (USA) in the early 1990s. |
| Tube kiln | A contemporary description of an inclined or horizontal kiln where the cross-section remains the same along the full length of the chamber from entrance to chimney. |
| Up-draught kiln | A kiln chamber where the flame is drawn upwards from the firebox, through the chamber directly to the chimney above. |

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| Vapour glaze | A glaze created by the volatilisation of alkaline oxides during a high-temperature firing. |
| Wadding | A mixture of materials used in packing pieces in vapour glaze and wood firings, to prevent them from sticking to kiln shelves or to each other. Materials including sand, alumina, sawdust, and many others can be used in making wadding. |
| Wedging | The kneading of clay by hand (or foot) in preparation for use. |
| Wicket | A small door – the door of the kiln (Middle English). |
| Yakishime | High-temperature wood-fired unglazed pottery (Japanese). |

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## The Log Book

*The Log Book* – the international publication for woodfirers and those interested in woodfiring and wood-fired ceramics. www.thelogbook.net

## Archives

The Gwyn Hanssen Pigott Archive, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, Australia

Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie Archive, Craft Study Centre, University for the Creative Arts, Farnham, Surrey, England

Bernard Leach Archive, Craft Study Centre, University for the Creative Arts, Farnham, Surrey, England

## Sound Recordings

https://sounds.bl.uk/Oral-history/Crafts

# Appendix I

## Selected Chronology

Significant events in the development of the practice of high-temperature woodfiring in the West between 1920 and 1980 with an emphasis on those relevant to the practices of Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, Jacqueline Lerat and Gwyn Hanssen Pigott.

1920 Bernard Leach (1887–1979) and his Japanese colleague Hamada Shōji (1894–1978) established a pottery in St Ives in Cornwall, England and build a chambered climbing kiln based on traditional Japanese and Korean models. This kiln is widely acknowledged as being the first of its kind to be built in the West

1924 The climbing kiln at St Ives was rebuilt by the Japanese potter and kiln builder Matsubayashi Tsurunosuke (1894–1932). Although modified to be oil-fired in 1937, side-stoking with wood continued

1925 Having spent the previous year training at the Leach Pottery, Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie (1895–1985) returned to her family's estate, Coleshill in Berkshire (England, to establish a workshop complete with a two-chambered woodfire kiln designed by Matsubayashi Tsurunosuke

Pleydell-Bouverie's kiln was fired for first time

1926 Michael Cardew (1901–1983) established Winchcombe Pottery in a former traditional pottery complete with a bottle kiln at Winchcombe, Gloucestershire (England)

1939 Cardew left Winchcombe under the management of his student Ray Finch (1914–2012) and moved to Wenford Bridge in Cornwall

Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie ceased using her woodfire kiln due to wartime blackout restrictions. It was never fired again

1940 *A Potter's Book* by Bernard Leach's was published

Cardew finished building an up-draught chamber kiln at Wenford Bridge

1941 Jean Lerat (1913–1992) began working in a studio established by François Guillaume in La Borne, France. The work he produced was fired in one of the large traditional kilns (*fours couchés*) in the village

1942 Paul Beyer (1873–1945) an artist who had previously worked at the Sèvres Manufactory arrived in La Borne, bringing with him a design for a woodfire kiln with a single firebox suitable for use by individual artists/potters, which was built at his new studio

1943 Jacqueline Bouvet (Lerat, 1920–2009) arrived in La Borne to work in the Guillaume studio

1944/45 A Sèvres type kiln of 0.75m³ with two fireboxes was built at the École Nationale des Beaux-Arts et des Arts Appliques a l'Industrie de Bourges

1945 Paul Beyer died and Jean and Jacqueline Lerat rented his studio and kiln

1947 Bulgarian artist and photographer Vassil Ivanoff (1897–1973) had a Sèvres type kiln with a single firebox, similar to Paul Beyer's, built in his studio in La Borne

1948/49 Students at Alfred University, Alfred, New York built experimental woodfire kilns under the guidance of their teacher Daniel Rhodes

1949 The Lerats bought the studio (and kiln) formerly used by Paul Beyer

Cardew added a 'first' down-draught chamber to the existing up-draught kiln at Wenford Bridge, based on his experience at Vumé in Africa

1952 Closure of Cross Roads Pottery in Verwood, east Dorset, the last traditional pottery in Britain where the kilns were fired entirely with wood

1953 Ivan McMeekin (1919–1993) returned to Australia having worked at Cardew's pottery at Wenford Bridge for three and a half years

1954 Ivan McMeekin built the first kiln with a Bourry type firebox in Australia at the newly established Sturt Pottery at Mittagong, New South Wales

1955 Gwyn John (Hanssen Pigott, 1935–2013) joined Ivan McMeekin at Sturt Pottery in Mittagong, as his apprentice

The Lerat's moved to Bourges and built a $2m^3$ Sèvres kiln with two fireboxes at their studio. This is the kiln that Jacqueline used up to the time of her death

1958 Ivan McMeekin's article 'A Wood Burning Kiln' was published in the British magazine *Pottery Quarterly*, and included detailed pull out plans

Gwyn John travelled to the UK and worked at the Leach Pottery and at Winchcombe

1960s The Danish potter Anne Kjærsgaard (1933–1990), a former apprentice at the Leach Pottery (1956–58) together with her husband Jean Linard built a series of woodfire kilns at their studio near La Borne including a large Japanese style climbing kiln based on the kiln at the Leach Pottery from plans given to her by Bernard Leach

1963 Gwyn (John) Hanssen visited La Borne and had work fired in Anne Kjærsgaard's kiln

1964/65 Gwyn Hanssen worked at Wenford Bridge and fired the kiln there several times

1966 Gwyn Hanssen moved to Achères near La Borne in France, and built a large three chambered kiln based on the kiln at St Ives, but with a Bourry firebox

1968 Daniel Rhodes' book *Kilns Design Construction and Operation* was published

Gwyn Hanssen's kiln at Achères, France was fired for the first time

1970 Daniel Rhodes' book *Tamba, the Timeless Art of a Japanese Village* was published

Ivan McMeekin's article on the Bourry-box kiln was published in *Pottery in Australia* and included pull out plans

1971 A six chamber climbing kiln (the Woolman Lane kiln) was built during a workshop ('Earth Air Fire Water') led by Richard Hotchkiss in California

1973 Frederick Olsen's book *Kilns* was published

1974 Ruth Gowdy McKinley's comprehensive account of the catenary arch kiln she built at Sheridan College in Canada was published in *Studio Potter* (USA)

Svend Bayer built his first woodfire kiln based on those he had seen in Korea and South-East Asia, in Connecticut, USA

1975 Mike Dodd built a 'Thai' kiln, with Peter Schofield in Cornwall, England

Svend Bayer built a 17m³ kiln at his studio in Devon, England

1976 Peter Callas built what is generally accepted as the first Asian style single chamber kiln (anagama) in the West, in New York State, USA

1977 Horst Kerstan (1942–2005) built what was probably the first anagama in Europe, at his pottery in the Black Forest, Germany

1978 Steen Kepp built his 'Tanegashima' style tunnel kiln in La Borne, France

1979 Peter Voulkos' work was wood-fired in Peter Callas' anagama for the first time, in a collaboration that continued for over twenty years

Louise Allison Cort's book *Shigaraki Potters' Valley,* was published

Plans for the 'Phoenix fastfire' kiln were published in the *Studio Potter*

1980 Anne Stannard's article on the Bourry-box kiln was published in *Studio Potter*

## Appendix II

A list of some of the national and international woodfire conferences that took place between 1983 and 2018

### USA

1983 – April – Japan Society in New York
May – 'Peters Valley Woodfire Conference', Peters Valley Craft Center, New Jersey
1991 – 'American Woodfire '91' National Woodfire Conference, University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa (*) **
1999 – 'Different Stokes' International Woodfire Conference, University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa (*) **
2004 – 'The Naked Truth' International Woodfire Conference, Coe College, Cedar Rapids, Iowa (*) **
2006 – '20 + 1 years of the Tozan Kilns' International Woodfire Conference, Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, Arizona (*) **
2016 – International Woodfire Conference, Waubonsee Community College, Sugar Grove, Illinois**
2017 – International Woodfire Conference, Star Art Center, Star, North Carolina**

### Australia

1986 – National Woodfire Conference, Monash University, Gippsland, Victoria (*)
1989 – 'Woodfire '89' International Woodfire Conference, Gulgong, New South Wales (*) **
1992 – International Woodfire Conference, Northern Rivers University, Lismore, NSW (*)
1993 – Fire Up Gulgong, International Woodfire Event, Gulgong, New South Wales (*)
2001 – Tanja Woodfire Conference, Tanja, NSW
2005 – International Woodfire Conference, Gundaroo, NSW**
2008 – Sturt International Woodfire Conference, Sturt Craft Centre, Mittagong, NSW**
2011 – International Woodfire Conference, Deloraine, Tasmania
2017 – 'Smoke on the Water' International Woodfire Conference, Cooroy, Queensland

### Europe

2010 – 1st European Woodfire Conference, Bröllin, Germany**
2014 – 2nd European Woodfire Conference, International Ceramic Research Center, Skælskør, Denmark**
2018 – 3rd European Woodfire Conference, La Borne, France**

Notes:
(*) Those conferences marked with an asterisk within parenthesis had proceedings published or printed catalogues of exhibitions held to coincide with them. (See bibliography for details of these publications.)
** Conferences marked with a double asterisk indicate those at which I I presented as lecturer or panel moderator/member (11), and attended (1).